Jesus' Crazy Dream

God's Healing Through my Wife's Love

Sean & Kelsey Launey

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Additional sources

Some charts inspired by concepts from "The 4 Laws of Love" by Jimmy Evans.

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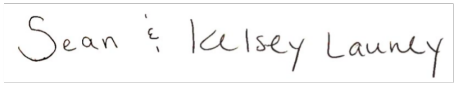
Introduction

From:



We are not apostles. We write this as your brother and sister, asking you in love to obey Christ's commands because of His authority, to which you have submitted.

May God's grace and peace be with all of our believing brothers and sisters who find this message to you. We pray for all of you.

> By the blood of Jesus, the Root and the Heir of David, and His Resurrection,
>
> By the faith of those who came before us,
>
> And by God's leading, as He led Joseph's brothers back to him, paving a road to salvation from the path to Hell which they paved,
>
> He has called each of us out from our own way into this Family.

You are dearly loved by God and us.

We thank God for you:

Firstly, that He has set you apart, so that we can have the comfort of seeing your faces from the Day that we are called Home until forever –and the comfort of knowing that an unimaginable comfort is ahead of you,

Also, for the suffering that you have endured willingly *for obeying* Him, some even to the point of death,

For "*random*" suffering that you have endured, holding onto faith —unlike us, as you will soon read —as you wait for Him to answer your prayers as life beats on you like a dry, never-ending sandstorm,

For the things that you have left behind you for His sake,

For the people that you have left behind you for His sake,

For the things that you have lost for His sake,

And for the people that you have lost because of joining us in serving Jesus.

Your suffering is strength to us, and our suffering is strength to you, as is our healing.

Our story will be strength to you.

1. No One Else's Fault

A Woman of God

Hello, I'm Kelsey. My husband Sean and I wrote this book twice. We read our first draft and decided to throw it out and start over. If you held the first draft in your hands now, you would be embarking on the journey of two *victims*.

When Jesus tells His disciples He is going to be with the Father, He encourages them, "You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."

Romans tells us, "We are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us," and that nothing separates us from that love.

This is the love Jesus spoke with when He gave the command to be courageous in our suffering! Yet instead of having courage in that love, we choose to walk away from it when we experience suffering. We use heartache and pain to justify our sin and "wise" worldly teaching to reason ourselves into bad decisions. Instead of living by faith and obeying what God says, we decide to go our own way. We nurse our trauma and allow our feelings to rule us. We will-

ingly become conquered, and the devil laughs.

I've shared my testimony as if it was my story. I've spoken about my hurt, fears, brokenness, loneliness, false teachings and identities that I internalized. These were all the "cause" or the "why" of my sin that made it understandable to other people. I wanted my sin to make sense, so I appealed to the humanity in others to make it make sense.

The problem with this is it removes the responsibility of my sin, but also the power of God's grace. There is no reason that makes sense: I lived in full rebellion against my Father's love and chose sin. Yes, things of this world had left me a bottomless pit of needing love, but that need could only be met by fully submitting to God.

My life is not my story, but God's. He has a plan and a will for me, and I can obey Him in faith, even when I have all my human reasons not to, or I can live in sin. This is true of everyone, regardless of their background and upbringing. His love is the only perfect love and His way is the only way. I will not try to make my sin understandable or justify it. There is no one to account for my sin but myself. What should draw your heart into this story is that even when we were all *enemies* of God, He still pursues us. Relentlessly. With complete mercy, grace, and love.

A Man of God

Hey! I'm Sean.

You should know what we are leaving out of our stories. We are not going to bring up any trauma, and we are not going to threaten the reputations of anyone in our lives, old or new.

We are doing this because, despite our trauma and what has been done and taught to us, we are responsible for our own

actions. We answered to God for our sins, and that is how we found freedom –not by holding onto our trauma, disadvantages, or things that others have done to us.

Instead, we hold onto God's truth, which places the blame on ourselves—but also washes us clean and frees us from all blame! One way or another, all of us will answer to God for our sins. It's better to do it now than when you are standing before His throne to be judged.

That being said, trauma is very real, and we have experienced a lot of it. When you get to the parts about the blessings and freedom that God gave to us, do not say to yourself, "But that's them; I have been through trauma." God won't consider your excuses when it comes to Heaven or Hell. But you can be confident that your reward in Heaven will be much greater if you obey God if your hardship is greater!

This book contains no explicit sexual language that is visual or sinful for you to consume. However, we are honest in a way that may make you uncomfortable—about the ugliness of our sins and about the joys of marriage.

It's estimated that the average person is exposed to 25 to 120 sexual references per day, through conversations, shows, and social media. Being a human myself, I know that this number is actually much higher. Most of these references are welcomed, laughed at, or indulged, even by devout Christians. Almost zero of these references come from godly voices.

We know that everyone who picks up this book is (or was) "dirtier" than they would like to admit. We are humans too.

We normalize talking about sex as God sees it in our daily lives. If Satan gets to talk about sex 25 times in your day, we will steal the floor at least once. We want the people in our lives to experience God's gift as it was meant to be experienced.

2. The First Spark

A Woman of God

I grew up in a Presbyterian church. It was somewhere my family went twice a week, Sunday for church & Sunday school, and Wednesdays for kid's choir & catechism. It was a Christian routine in my life that I did not enjoy. We had to wake up early on Sunday and wear uncomfortable clothes. It was freezing in the sanctuary and as a kid, the sermons were long and dry. On Wednesday it meant a long evening after school with children I felt painfully awkward and shy around. I knew I was a "Christian" because my parents took me to church, but the experience was habitual and unpleasant.

My first personal encounter with Jesus happened in my 8th grade math class. I loved to escape through reading, and that day I was reading *This Present Darkness* by Frank Perreti. The book is fiction, but the story is about spiritual warfare. There is a scene in the story where angels are able to overcome the schemes of demons as a group of Christians meet to pray. It painted a picture of victory—a God who fights for His people, and a God who loves His children. This God I saw now was alive and active.

When I read this I felt warmth come over my entire body. I realized no matter how lonely or depressed I was, God was with me. Regardless of what I was experiencing or what seemed to be going wrong in my life, He was fighting for me. I felt invincible, like every victory was for me. I accepted Jesus as my Savior. I felt a sense of comfort and peace I had never known: I wasn't alone anymore. I walked out of math class that day differently. When anxiety or panic attacks came, as they often did, now I would pray or read Psalms. I was choosing to be comforted by God for the first time in my life. It was exciting, this God of victory.

3. Born Dead, then Made Alive

A Man of God

When I was a kid, there were a lot of things that I believed about God that were wrong. But, there were things that I was taught about God that are absolutely right:

- Jesus is God, and He died for my sins and rose from the dead. He is the only way to Heaven. There is a Hell.
- There is only one God, and you should only pray to Him. He created the world, He sees and knows everything that I do, and He can do anything.
- The Holy Spirit helps Christians to become more like Jesus, and all that you have to do to have the Holy Spirit in you is ask and believe.
- Sex outside of marriage is a sin.

I discovered masturbation by accident when I was 9.

I thought that I invented masturbation. I didn't even know that there was a word for it. I told myself that I had found a loophole to having sex outside of marriage. But I felt an awful guilt

that I could not explain.

One year into it, I decided that it was wrong,

> (Which of course it is. Why else would the Bible say to get married if you have sexual needs? Paul knew that masturbation existed. Surely, it would be easier to serve God and masturbate than to serve God and be married.)[1]
>
> However, I did not know this scripture. I just knew in my heart that it was wrong, from the beginning.
>
> Even after deciding to quit, I tried to justify it many times over the course of many, many years. It was hard not to justify it when it seemed impossible to quit.

I tried to quit. But I didn't. I did it again, and again, and again. Often more than once a day.

I was sinning. I was not innocent. I knew that what I was doing was wrong. I didn't fully understand it at that time, but I was robbing my future wife. It's her right to please me sexually, and no one else[2] –not even myself. It didn't matter whether or not I knew her yet or how difficult it was to wait. God would have sent me to Hell for this, and I was breaking my wife's heart.

By the time that I was 12, I learned to fantasize about women while I masturbated. This was nothing less than adultery.[3]

At 12, I was brought to a new church –a really fun church! They had good music, they had snacks and coffee, and people

1 1 Corinthians 7:32-32

2 1 Corinthians 7:4

3 Matthew 5:28

laughed during the message.

My dad sent me to a youth conference at this church because I was too shy to tell him "No."

The conference was the best three days of my life. I had never heard anything like what they preached before. Christine Caine, in particular, preached one of the most impactful sermons in my life to this day. She taught us that "We are the Church." Before hearing that, I thought that the church was just a building, but I came to understand that the Church is God's people on Earth who do His will.

The Holy Spirit had not yet entered me, but He spoke to me. Those three days, I kept hearing God ask me to give my whole life to Him.

I kept saying, "No, I don't want to be a pastor." Being a pastor sounded really lame to me.

God was not asking me to be a pastor, though. He wanted me to commit, for the rest of my life, to doing everything that He said—even if that meant being a pastor (such a silly side note).

Finally, it was the last sermon of the conference. Rich Wilkerson was speaking. I remember being blown away, but I don't remember what he spoke about.

I do remember him asking us to bow our heads and close our eyes. He started counting backwards from **ten**. He said that when he gets to one, if we want Jesus, he wants us to jump to our feet, throw our fist in the air, and yell, "I want the cross!"

"Nine."

My heart was pounding.

"Eight."

I was terrified. But I was dying for Jesus.

"Seven. Six. Five…"

I thought that I was going to be the only one to stand up and shout in a room of thousands.

"One"

"I WANT THE CROSS!"

It seemed like everyone in the room had stood up. I was frozen with one arm up. My nerves left me paralyzed.

He called us all to the front. While I was there, I prayed to God. I don't remember whether it was out loud or in my head, but I told God:

> "This is too awesome. I don't care if I have to be a pastor, I give my whole life to you."[4] In saying this, I trusted that God would guide me for the rest of my life.

SNAP.

I took my first breath of life.[5] It was like I had been dreaming my whole life and I finally woke up. The most powerful feeling overtook me; it was otherworldly. I've never experienced anything like it before or since.

I felt something like fire take over my whole body and blow out of my fingertips. Suddenly, I felt like I could do anything —like I could lift up both my feet and fly across the world in the blink of an eye —or like I could shout with enough force to crack all the concrete and paint in the room.

But all I wanted to do was worship, and that's what I did. The

4 Matthew 19:16-26

5 John 3:3

band was playing "You" by Hillsong, from their *Beautiful Exchange* album.

That day was the first day of my life. If I would have died a moment sooner than making that decision, I would have burned in Hell forever. Thank God, He saved me.

It was not the feeling that saved me—that doesn't happen to everyone. But it was the decision to submit every single part of my life to God, and the faith that He would forgive me[6] and guide me.[7]

6 Luke 23:39-43

7 John 14:15-26

4. A Heart of Stone

A Woman of God

About a year after I accepted Jesus as my Savior, at the end of my freshman year of high school, I met my ex. I will intentionally not be calling him my "first" anything because God gave me all of my "firsts" with my husband. That may make me sound delusional, but I am only speaking the truth of what God has done despite my sin.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"[8]

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."[9]

He has the power to redeem anything, and not to spoil any part of the story, but that's exactly what He did for me. Miraculously. Supernaturally. In His perfect love, He made me a new creation- the old me is dead and gone. The life I live

8 2 Corinthians 5:17

9 Galatians 2:20

in Christ has only ever loved one man, my husband. Wow, God is so good!

When I was 14 years old, I began dating my ex. By this point I knew sex outside of marriage was a sin and I had decided to wait until marriage. But I didn't. I chose the validation the relationship gave me instead of obeying God. I sinned against God and my husband. I was an adulterer, and I knew it.

In the beginning, the conviction would hit me like a ton of bricks every single time. I would pray and ask for forgiveness, but then I would go back to the same sin. The conviction was overwhelming. I had to choose—follow God completely no matter the cost, or sin.

I didn't want to let go of the relationship, so I hardened my heart when the conviction came. Eventually, I stopped asking for forgiveness. It was like dying, choosing not to live in faith. And I was. I was dead in my sin. I made the relationship an idol- turning to it for comfort, a sense of love, and fulfillment.

I stayed in this relationship for over a decade—through high school, college, graduate school, and entering the workforce. All the while, I was moving further and further from God even though throughout this time, I still called myself a Christian.

I would pray if I felt it was necessary, like God was a genie I could ask to fix problems in life like illnesses. There were even occasions when I went to church. I listened to Christian radio for encouragement. And if I really wanted to look or feel like a Christian, I would post a picture with scripture as a caption on my Instagram.

I thought if God loved me, He wanted me to be happy, even if that meant having sex outside of marriage. The sin seemed inconsequential to me. I knew everything God did

for me in Jesus on the cross, and I still turned my back on Him and chose my own way.

I was happy to have Jesus as a Savior, but I did not want Him as my Lord.

All the pain and emptiness I had in my life evolved as I continued to live in sin. It didn't stop in adultery. It grew into countless other forms of idolatry: disordered eating, feminism, veganism, yoga mysticism, and social media obsession. I was living for myself and my flesh, trying desperately to numb the pain I had and relinquish the shame that clung to me. It was like aimlessly walking through a desert choosing to drink salt water instead of stopping in the oasis that is living fully submitted to God.

5. Stuck in Loneliness & Addiction

A Man of God

The next six months of my life were really hard.

For one thing, I thought that giving my life to Jesus meant that I was free from my addiction to masturbation. But only two weeks passed before I did it again, and I was back in just as deeply as I was before.

Up until this point, I had told no one about my sin, and through going to church, I learned that God and the Bible command us to confess our sins to other believers.

So, I decided that I would, and I was terrified.

My heart was beating out of my chest. It felt like something I couldn't actually do, like jumping off of a cliff. But I made the jump:

> The first time that I confessed was at a men's night at church. But that was not very helpful because I hardly ever saw those men since that night. I kept masturbating.

The second time was to a youth leader who had taken the time to notice me. That was more helpful, but I still kept masturbating.

The third time, three things happened at the same time:

1. I told my dad that I was struggling with masturbation. I figured that since he lived in the same house as me, and he knew, then it would be too awkward for me to do it.

2. My cousin died in a gun accident. I was terrified. My cousin was only 12 days older than me. I realized that I could die any day. I was very motivated to stop sinning.

3. I read this verse in Romans:

   > "Therefore, we have no obligation to do what the sinful nature urges us to do."
   >
   > And I believed. I completely stopped masturbating, for maybe 1 or 2 years.

Sometimes I even thought to myself, "What if I masturbated right now?" and I laughed because I was so confident that I was free. "You have no obligation" was all that I had to remember, and I was free.

But besides sexual sin, I was also stuck in another hole for many years:

> I had no friends, and I didn't know how to make any. Much less Christian friends. For years, I had

never had a friend stay the night or even talked to anyone outside of school. I could barely get anyone to talk to me *at* school.

But I knew that I needed a friend because that's what they taught at church. I kept telling God, "If you give me a godly friend, I promise that I will keep You first in my life."

After a year of praying, God opened my heart. I learned to seek to be there for others instead of waiting for them to seek me out.

After that, it seemed that I had more friendships and deeper friendships than anyone else that I knew.

But another hole I was stuck in for years longer:

The moment that I gave my life to Jesus was a supernatural, feelings-charged experience.

At first, I thought that it was something that everyone had to experience if they were "really saved."

I learned that was wrong within a few months or years.

But for more than a decade after that, I really struggled because I did not experience those feelings again.

Everyone in my church was talking about "feeling the presence of God" during worship, and I felt nothing that I would describe that way.

I chased the feeling and did not find it.

I thought that something was wrong with me.

Now, you probably noticed earlier that I mentioned that I got free from masturbation for one or two years. Sadly, I did start again.

One day I just did it. I don't remember why.

I tried to just move past it.

Then, a few months later, I did it again.

Then one month later.

Two weeks.

One week.

Finally, I was in just as deep as I ever was. I even did it sometimes while driving.

It was an awful sin, especially against God and my future wife. I chose to please myself at their expense. I said that I would quit a million times yet found myself doing it over and over. I was haunted by guilt every second of every day. I felt that I had no way to stop.

I did not understand. For some reason, it was no longer working to tell myself "You have no obligation to do what the sinful nature urges you to do."

6. When the Stone Caught Fire

A Woman of God

After college, my ex moved to California for graduate school. After a few months of long distance, we got engaged. I finished my first year of working, then moved across the country to live with him. In November of that year –over the span of two or three weeks –my mom's parents and my dad's mom were all diagnosed with cancer.

My Mawmaw (my dad's mom) passed away unexpectedly, as it was only a month after her diagnosis. I was catching a connecting flight home for Christmas when my brother called to tell me that even though she had been responding well to treatments, her health had taken a sudden turn and she wasn't doing well. I needed to come see her as soon as possible. When my flight landed home, he called again to tell me she was gone. It was a devastating shock.

My Grandma Jewell (my mom's mom) was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. The doctors projected she would live another 3-6 months with treatment. The grief for my Mawmaw and the fear and uncertainty with my Grandma Jewell's diagnosis, coupled with the homesickness I was

feeling living in another state, led to a profound time of loneliness in my life. On top of that loneliness, I was also feeling newfound resentment towards my ex since we had begun living together.

My decision to put the validation of my relationship ahead of pleasing God did not stop with my initial decision to have sex outside of marriage. I made similar decisions, over and over again—for years—creating a pattern of numbing myself to my convictions in order to receive the validation that I got from the relationship.

I had made the relationship an idol, so I lived to please him. But now I was at a breaking point. In my eyes, I had moved across the country to be with him, despite my reservations, and now I was away from my entire family during a time of crisis. Instead of acknowledging that I had been—to put it simply—"people pleasing" instead of obeying God, I saw my pattern of disobedience as me being noble, sacrificial, and loving. And it made me bitter.

I was so swallowed up in bitterness and loneliness that I decided to start seeing a therapist. At my first session, the therapist swiftly identified me as "co-dependent".

In worldly terms, codependency in a relationship is when a person's needs and desires become so intertwined with another person, that they make decisions and develop patterns that are to their detriment. Now that I am a Christian, I would define codependency as serving a person out of fear instead of submitting to and trusting God. A person who trusts and submits to God does not need to seek to maintain control or validation in a relationship. That is what I had been doing for years.

I was only a few sessions into therapy when COVID-19 cases began to appear in the U.S. With quarantine and social distancing on the horizon, my ex and I immediately bought

plane tickets home in the beginning of March 2020. I went home to my mom and he went home to his parents for quarantine. We didn't see each other for months. In the summer of 2020, we returned to California to tie up loose ends before moving back home to live with our parents separately.

Since we were no longer living together, it was easy to feel a false sense of comfort in our relationship. Cracks in my life had appeared to me while we were living together, but now I had a comfortable distance from them. I could chalk it up to a failed experiment.

"It'll work out better when we get married," I told myself. Meanwhile, we had our space from each other, with no real wedding date set. I was "working on" my codependency through self-help books and an app that would send me positive affirmations once a day. My finger was in the dam that was about to break.

In November 2020, my Grandma Jewell passed away after a year long fight with pancreatic cancer. She was a profound woman of faith, and her marriage to my Grandpa Jewell was the only God-centered relationship I was able to witness when I was growing up. I vividly remember witnessing them pray together one morning.

I had woken up earlier than anyone expected, as young children sometimes do, and had just ventured into the living room as they bowed their heads together in the quiet of their kitchen. I was in silent awe of this intimate act of unity and devotion. My whole life, they were active in their church and rooted in the Word together. She was humble, patient, loving, and submitted to her husband with grace. From the time I saw them pray together, I had a desire for a marriage with not just a romantic partner, but a co-laborer in faith.

But as my life went on, "There's no way you could ever be like them" was the lie whispered to me when I looked up to

them.

At my Grandma Jewell's funeral, the pastor spoke highly of her faith. She was a woman of God. You could see it, the pastor remarked, in how she loved her husband and her children. "You got a glimpse of heaven on earth in your wife," he told my Grandpa Jewell. With those words, I instantly heard God say: "You're not ready to be a wife, and you're going to miss the plans I have for you if you keep going the way you're going."

I was stubborn and didn't listen at first, but God didn't let me go easily.

About two weeks later, my ex and I got in a fight and we didn't speak for a week. My bitterness that had been simmering finally boiled over as the relationship that I had built my whole life on sank in the sand. I knew I had nothing left to stand on, and it made me furious. My anger was so overwhelming, I felt like I was choking on it. I sought counseling through a virtual counseling app. It had the option to select a Christian therapist, and I took it.

My therapist walked me through an "anger iceberg" exercise. She explained that a lot of feelings present as anger –the tip of the iceberg–but it is important to identify everything that is underneath. I identified hurt, shame, betrayal, insecurity, jealousy, abandonment, anxiety, frustration, sadness, and fear. This iceberg wasn't new. I had been carrying it for a long time. Maybe as long as I could remember. It felt like a part of me that could only be removed if it was surgically cut out. At the end of myself, I acknowledged I needed God as desperately as I needed air to breathe. I couldn't handle everything I was feeling alone. After almost 12 years of rebellion, I walked back into church with a heart that was broken open. My Father welcomed me back with open arms.

The first church service I attended was about the names of

God. I'm so grateful God gave me this word first. I had kept Him in a box for years that I would only open if I saw it necessary, and I needed to acknowledge Him for who He is.

Abba, my Father.

Adonai, Lord and Master.

El Shaddai, God Almighty.

Elohim, the Creator.

Jehovah Yahweh, the Great I AM.

Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our Banner.

Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our Healer.

Jehovah-Rohi, the Lord our Shepherd.

Jehovah Shalom, the Lord is Peace.

I saw that I cannot exist outside of God. I could not live with a Savior that I didn't also acknowledge as my Lord. He is uncompromising and His power is all encompassing. His way is the only way. And even in all His glory and majesty, He loved the world enough to make a way to restore the broken and bring them back to Him. He saw me the entire time I was running from Him, and in His perfect love He pursued me. Everything I was carrying and trying to do on my own, He wanted to bear for me. His grace met me, and I realized just how desperate I was for Him.

I started to faithfully attend a nondenominational church and read my bible everyday. I bought a devotional journal specifically for anxiety and fear. I journaled the scripture,

what God was speaking to me through it, and my prayers. At the turn of the new year, my church announced their word for 2021: *forward*. I fervently took notes during services:

Forward—how we forget about things of the past and focus on the prize ahead of us.

Our hope is not in the new year, but in a God that makes all things new

Philippians 3:13-14

No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it. But I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

I have not achieved it. But God is still working. It took God a week to make everything I see but He's still working on me. Be patient with people (and yourself)

But I'm still focusing on ONE thing. Paul pivoted his focus to move forward in joy.

Proverbs 23:7 For as man thinks in his heart, so is he.

Move forward in knowledge.

Move forward without regret.

The past is paid for and the future is provided for.

Move forward in faith.

Everything in the kingdom of God is about moving forward.

Forgetting those things which are behind.

Some people don't let themselves move forward because they can't forget the failures of their past. Learn from it but don't live in it.

The Bible says we are born with a sin nature: bent toward evil. Sinning comes naturally to us. We're in bondage and we don't know it. The cross, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus broke that bondage. The problem is while we are free we are not free indeed. The power of sin is broken but satan is the accuser of the brothers: if you hold onto the past you can't move forward.

Satan uses three things:

Guilt- I did something bad

Shame- I am someone bad . Shame isolates. As soon as sin entered Adam and Eve hid because of their shame.

Condemnation- I deserve something bad. The enemy tries to pull your soul from Jesus. He doesn't want you to live like you're free.

Isaiah 43:25 Even I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

Forgiving.

If we're going to forget some things we have to forgive some things. Trauma is real and pain is inevitable. Moving forward means forgiveness.

The past was behind me and God was before me and with me. I saw my identity was in Christ, and with that, I put all the shame of my past to rest. I had let trauma rule me, and that is why I stayed stuck in sin. The God of victory I had first experienced in my 8th grade class had victory over

trauma too. There is no wound He cannot heal when we have faith to obey. I had to stop nursing these wounds by refusing to give God my heart and my life, including that anger iceberg. I didn't have to cut it out; I only needed to give it to Him. The more I held onto everything trauma had taught me, the more I had tried to outrun the God who was pursuing me. The only one who could heal me and love me truly.

God was my focus and my source in moving forward. He had everything that I had ever needed, and I never wanted to depart from Him again. I got baptized on February 21, 2021. My new life had begun.

7. Dark Decades: Loss after Loss

A Man of God

For more than several years, I prayed for the same four things every night:

1. My family to be saved
2. Freedom from masturbation
3. A wife
4. More of the Holy Spirit

But, the pattern in my life was always the same: before knowing Jesus and after, life only got worse as it went on.

My family only seemed to get further and further from me and from God. And they got deeper and deeper into suffering, too. It has been so unfathomably painful to watch.

I was masturbating just as much in my twenties as I was in middle school. I confessed my sin to every Christian man that I came across, hoping that God might use them to help me get

free. It must have been thousands of men over the years, but all of them were clueless on how to help me. It seemed that (at least) most of them were stuck in sexual sin themselves, but just did it much less often than me.

Getting a wife always seemed impossible to me, but as time went on, it only seemed more and more unlikely. Until I was 23 years old, every girl that I ever asked out rejected me (This was my fault for many reasons, although I did not fully realize it at the time).

When I finally graduated college with a Bachelor's, I could not afford to take care of all of my bills with the job that my degree got me. In fact, there was no way on paper, even by advancing to higher positions, that I would ever be able to support a wife, much less a family. I felt altogether undesirable, not valued highly by my employer and not valuable to any woman.

My whole life was church, especially my Christian brothers.

Sadly, I lost almost all of those who I considered brothers. I am talking 99%.

> My heart was torn from my chest as I fought for them and prayed for them but watched them walk in and out –over and over and over and over again.
>
> Most of them walked away from Jesus entirely. Many of them got upset with our church and left for another one. Some of them stayed in our church but decided to drift from me. These things are all also true for those that I considered mentors.

I was very different from the people at my church. There were things that I disagreed with my church on. Now, I know that I was wrong about most of those things, but the Brothers in my life simply lacked the ability to explain to me where I was wrong. And they could not hear where I was right.

I wanted to help my church, but they held me back. I felt like my church thought that I had nothing to offer. I felt like an alien among nonbelievers, but I also felt like an alien in the place that was supposed to be my home. I was alone.

Then, I got a back injury, and I saw a different side of many people in my life. Everyone was pleased with me before because I would always eagerly volunteer to do whatever was helpful. But with my injury, I could no longer bend over without severe consequences. People started to think that I was entitled or lazy because I wouldn't do certain kinds of work, because I would do work slowly, or because I asked others to do work for me. I had no clue that people had such evil thoughts waiting to be uncovered.

Yes, a lot on this list of hardships were my fault. But my point is that I only ever saw my life get worse.

I specifically remember getting in an argument with a friend who was trying to encourage me. I told him, "No, life only gets worse, until the day that we are finally relieved by going to Heaven."

I held real tightly to the values of contentment and selflessness. Any time that I heard preaching about something like "God is going to bring breakthrough in your life," I was upset. I thought that what people needed to hear was that they need to put their hope in Heaven, and nothing else.

I did no research into Deconstructionism (I'm referring to the kind of Deconstructionism where, basically, YouTubers pick apart pastors' sermons and tell you what the Bible is actually saying), but I arrived at a lot of the same conclusions.

The reason that so many of my friends left Jesus, I thought, was because the church promised them a breakthrough that never arrived –because God never promised it.

The reason that so many Christians are so disinterested in

others, I thought, was because those Christians were so stuck on looking for breakthroughs for themselves.

Over the years, my prayer for a wife evolved into:

"...Please give me a woman who is godly, selfless, warm, fun, and beautiful."

But, I would pray it by starting out this way:

"God, I don't even believe that You are going to do this, but…"

Meanwhile, I was bouncing from girl to girl, just trying to get someone to date me.

No one would (Thank God, literally).

Every time I asked out a girl, I was doing it to prove to myself and everyone else that I was worth something.

"If I could get this girl," I would think to myself, "then I can finally get over the last girl that rejected me." I knew this wasn't true; I was an unending pit.

What an awful thing for me to do to my Sisters in Christ.

Through Christian counseling I had come to understand that (1) the reason that I masturbated and (2) the reason that I locked onto unavailable women was that I needed to be loved by a woman, but I was scared to be unloved by a woman.

Understanding why I sinned was not enough to get me free, though.

One day, I prayed to God:

> "Please help me not to need a woman."

Thankfully, God responded:

> "Love that needs is not love."
>
> In other words, if you need someone else to love you in order for you to love them, then you don't really love them.

He revealed to me that I needed to decide to love my wife, whether or not she neglects me or is able to meet my needs.

He didn't free me from my need, He told me not to put my needs above Him or my wife.

> So, from that point on, when I was tempted to masturbate, I told myself: "Love that needs isn't love." I decided that I was going to love my wife in action—in that moment—by not masturbating.
>
> I also recommitted myself in those moments to actively loving her in our future marriage, whether or not she meets my needs.

Also, God opened my eyes to the past, and I realized that I did have the power to say "no" each and every time that I masturbated. Otherwise, I would not have been guilty![10] Here is the proof:

> There were a lot of times in my life when I was barely tempted to masturbate, but I did it anyway –because I figured that I would end up doing it again later, so why not now?
>
> BUT—there were many times throughout my life when, fueled by pure passion, I pressed through the whole night wrestling against my relentless sexual desire.
>
> I can do that every time; I finally realized: No matter how hard it is, I always have a choice.

10 1 Corinthians 10:13

> This is true for every sin, for everyone, all the time.

I started masturbating a lot less—it was a night and day difference—but I had not discovered my full freedom yet.

Also, this day while praying, I decided that I was going to give up on looking for a wife. I wasn't going to pursue dating anyone unless God dropped it into my lap.

> I had given up before, but those times were out of hopelessness ("I'll never be married anyway," I would tell myself).

This time, however, something strange happened. I told God:

> "I know that I can't do this on my own; I trust you to bring me the wife that I am praying for."

And I meant it. And I carried that faith with me everywhere from that day on. I don't know where the faith came from! It was very out of character for me. Little did I know, God gave me faith at just the right time.

8. Refining Flames Burned Stone to Flesh

A Woman of God

My ex and I didn't break up when I got saved. After the fight that got me back in church and counseling, we decided to work on our relationship. With all the talk of God making things new, I chose to believe that's what was going to happen in our relationship, but it didn't. Thank God, He had something better planned for me.

If you ever hear a story of someone winning their boyfriend or girlfriend to God, it's because one of them surrendered to God and then the other followed immediately. If they do not immediately surrender to God with you, the Bible very clearly says to break up with them, whether they claim that they are a "Christian" or not.

However, if you are already married when you finally surrender to God, you can trust that God will one day save your spouse.[11]

Do not think that you can make a sinful relationship holy

11 1 Peter 3:1-2

by marrying them[12] or that you can change your boyfriend/girlfriend's heart.[13]

I already knew about this Scripture:

"Do not be [unequally bound together] with unbelievers."[14]

However, I rebelled against God by staying with my ex for almost another year and a half.

He told me he didn't want to get married, so I gave the ring back. We were "together"—but not engaged. He moved to Florida, but that did not stop me. We dated long distance.

I wanted to live my life for God. I learned a lot in therapy about the psychological effects of trauma and effective communication, but the most important thing I learned was that I had to give God proper authority in my life. There were things in my life and my relationship I tried to explain away in therapy. My therapist would not have it, and while she had the psychological explanation for disagreeing, what she always came back at me with was Scripture. I heavily relied on what I was feeling to determine what I thought God wanted, even if it disagreed with Scripture, and one day in righteous indignation she told me:

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[15]

12 Matthew 14:3-4

13 1 Corinthians 15:33

14 2 Corinthians 6:14

15 Hebrew 4:12 NKJV

She paraphrased the verse before deciding to pull up the Bible and read it word for word. Then she went on to explain that the Bible is not a book of suggestions or good ideas. It is the authoritative Word of God and if I was going to follow God and read the Bible, I had to treat it for what it was.

What He says is sin is sin, even if everyone in the world tells me that it isn't. That meant my actions needed to change depending on what God's Truth says, even if my emotions disagreed.

God confirmed this for me in my private prayer and devotional time with the verse from Isaiah:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts."[16]

It wasn't up to me to understand why God says what He says, but to obey wholeheartedly, trusting that His way is better than mine no matter what.

By January 2021, my ex and I had gone on two dates since I started going back to church, and I was making an effort to communicate like I was learning to do in therapy. On the second date I communicated that our sexual relationship went against my conscience. I wasn't sure what I wanted my boundaries to be yet. In counseling, I was very open about a lot with my relationship, but I kept quiet about this at first. I didn't realize it at the time, but I felt the clock start ticking on the word *yet*. I knew it was only a matter of time before he would initiate something physically, and I needed to have a firm and unwavering answer.

16 Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV

I wanted my answer to be what God says about sex, not how I feel about it. So, I made the decision to tell my Christian counselor everything, and I thank God I did. She responded with only truth.

"And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'...

"So, Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

"And Adam said:

"'This is now bone of my bones

"'And flesh of my flesh;

"'She shall be called Woman,

"'Because she was taken out of Man.'

"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."[17]

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is out-

17 Genesis 2:18, 20-25 NKJV

side the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."[18]

"Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband."[19]

I learned that from the beginning, God's heart has been for marriage. Marriage was created by Him and for Him. Sex was made specifically for marriage, and having sex outside that covenant is sin. If I was going to continue living fully submitted to God, I had to obey His heart for marriage and sex.

My ex told me he didn't believe sex outside marriage was a sin. I should have ended the relationship there. But I didn't.

I chose to stay with him.

Not only that, I chose to spend time with him with no accountability.

And I chose to spend the night with him—often.

I began to sin sexually again.

And when this happened, I would downplay it.

18 1 Corinthians 6:18 NKJV

19 1 Corinthians 7:2-3 NKJV

You're just human.

It wasn't that bad; it could have gone much further.

We have to spend the night together if we are ever going to see each other.

It's not anyone else's business what goes on in my relationship.

Any man would struggle with waiting for marriage.

It's not like we haven't already done this, and eventually we will get married, so it's not the worst thing in the world if we do it now.

I was spitting in the face of not only His Truth about marriage, but His Truth about sin, the power of the resurrection, and the Truth of His character—as a good Father who longs to give me good things, including a godly spouse who would honor my purity.

If I was trusting God, I would have given myself accountability by telling other believers in my life, including my therapist, about my sin. I would have never spent the night with him. Ultimately, I would have ended the relationship as soon as my ex said he didn't believe sex outside marriage was a sin. Instead, I held onto the relationship and continued to willingly give away something meant only for the spouse God had intended for me.

My faith was so small compared to what God had in store for me. It was easy for me to feel comfortable though, because outside of my relationship with my ex, my life looked completely different. I was faithful in going to church. I read my Bible everyday. I prayed and spent time with the Lord. I read books about God's design for marriage, Bible doc-

trine, and living for God. I joined a weekly Bible study and found not only friendships for the first time in my adult life, but friendships with godly, spirit-filled women. Spirit-filled women who had the discernment to ask me questions when I was silent about my relationship and the sin I was in…

My best friend Kayla, who would later be maid of honor at my wedding, asked me one day, "What if he isn't the one?"

I balked, "I know there could be someone out there who I would be more aligned with, but I'm comfortable with him. God has already done so much work in us."

What I meant was, I know we're unequally yoked but…

I've already put a lot of time into this relationship and I'm scared to give up on it.

I think my walk with God will be enough to get us through.

I was relying on my works to build the kingdom I wanted instead of faithfully obeying God in all things and trusting His plans for me. But God was faithful and didn't leave me where I was.

By the end of 2021, I was getting antsy about marriage. Surely the walk I was on now was the walk God wanted me to be on when He told me I wasn't ready to be a wife, I thought.

I could sense God was about to do something big, so in December 2021 I decided to get off social media to remove distractions from my life. I thought the big thing would be my ex's breakthrough and a proposal. In January, we got in a fight after he said he still wasn't ready for marriage. Afterwards, I paced my apartment praying for God to change his heart, to make him ready, to give me the breakthrough I had patiently been waiting for. His response was, "Child, aren't you done with this? Because I'm ready to sharpen you."

It's embarrassing to say now, but I took that to mean that I needed to be more patient.

In the next two months, the fighting about marriage became more frequent. I gritted my teeth and told myself to have patience. Then one day I found myself praying, "God, do I really want to stay in this relationship?"

No.

God made it almost impossible for me to do the wrong thing, but I still did. I still held on to this relationship.

I went through the next week in a fog. This wasn't the way I thought things were going to go. I was waiting for a breakthrough that was starting to look like it would never happen, but I didn't want to give up. I began praying for God to make it completely obvious what I should do.

The next weekend, my ex proposed. In complete shock, I said yes.

The next 72 hours were brutal. Minutes into our second engagement, the fighting began. God was making it obvious for me.

The dissonance felt like setting myself on fire, because in my flesh I still wanted to make him—and myself—happy. I was so close to getting what I thought I wanted, but it was all wrong.

I could hear God speaking to me, "It's not supposed to be this way."

I could have made the decision to go right back to old patterns of people-pleasing. Instead, I texted Kayla everything. There was so much of the relationship I had been hiding because I didn't want to acknowledge the way things were, but I knew I couldn't anymore. I needed accountability from

another believer.

She texted back, “It’s not supposed to be this way.”

I knew it was over. God had answered my prayer and made it obvious. Three days after I said yes to marrying him, I decided to break up with my ex. I was terrified. I felt like I had thrown away almost twelve years of my life, but it was what God wanted me to do. I couldn’t argue with it. I made a decision in faith.

A lot of emotions came with ending this relationship. I took them all to God. Initially, I felt a lot of bitterness. My ex got the freedom he had wanted while I was single for the first time in my adult life, when I genuinely felt ready to be a wife. I wanted to be a godly wife. I felt like I had lost. God spoke to me, “The husband I have for you is walking with me in such a way that it’s already honoring you- even though he doesn’t know you yet.”

At first when I ended it, it was comforting to believe it wasn’t all a waste because the relationship was a good thing that just had to end. We grew apart. We just wanted different things …all the platitudes that are meant to soften the blow of ending a relationship.

But, in God revealing to me that He had a husband for me who was not only walking with Him, but honoring me in that walk, I realized just how awful it was that I was ever in that relationship. It was wicked for me to attempt to comfort myself for holding onto something in fear for so long by pretending any part of it was “good”. That comfort wasn’t faith. It was callous to God’s heart for me, and to my sin.

I prayed for Him to change my heart to want what He wants. I began to see the relationship for what it was: a chain on my life. As long as I held onto it, my heart wasn’t completely surrendering to God. If that relationship was never something God wanted

for me, why would I mourn the loss of it for a single second? I let gratitude fill my heart instead of the pain of loss as I thanked God for breaking that chain off of me. I wasn't holding onto anything for peace or comfort but God, so I now had freedom to live entirely for Him. About a week after the break-up, I was no longer heartbroken. It was supernatural.

Sometimes fear would still creep in that I wasted a lot of time in my life and that it would be too hard to have a long-term relationship again. A friend encouraged me, "God can redeem anything, even time. With the man He has for you, it's not going to be so hard."

My mom told me the same thing, "It's not going to be long," she said, "You just wait."

I decided to not fear, and trust. I happily buckled up for the long haul of being single. With all the striving I had done in my last relationship, I decided only God could make my next relationship happen. I was going to keep living for Him and trust Him to bring my husband to me. "You're going to have to make it obvious, God," I prayed. "You're going to have to hit me in the face with it. **He's basically going to have to come to my front door**."

I'm so happy I was frank with God. He hears every prayer, and He is always faithful to answer.

Two weeks passed…

9. Our Dream Come True

A Man of God

Two weeks after deciding to trust God for the wife that I was praying for, I was at a young adults' service at my church.

A Woman of God

Even though I had been attending our church for about a year and a half, I had never attended a Young Adults' service or event. I was 26 at the time, and I had always thought that was too "old". But now, I genuinely wanted to get as much out of my season of singleness as possible and I knew that meant having community at my church. A friend in my small group invited me and I figured I couldn't say I was too old until I at least tried. I decided to say yes to every opportunity to be part of the church body that was presented to me.

A Man of God

The pastor ended the service in an unusual way. After his message, they dimmed the lights and the band played as we sat for a time of reflection.

He asked us to spread out, so I put my head down and walked to the back of the aisle.

After several minutes we ended with a song. Then they closed service, and all the lights came on –and there she was:

The woman that I had been waiting for all my life.

But I didn't know it yet. In fact, I barely knew her. I had seen her around church and in gatherings with friends. But honestly, I couldn't even remember her name.

I said hello, and that was all it took. She wrapped me up in conversation for a long time.

This was my first time meeting Sean with a heart that was ready for what God had for me, but the couple of times we had met before this night, he made an impression on me.

In October 2021 I was having a conversation with Kayla at a Women's Bible Study event at our church. She was going to be leading and she had forgotten her Bible in her car. It was storming outside. A man she knew on staff at our church had walked up to say hello when she realized her Bible was in her car, and he offered immediately to go get it. As we watched him run out the door into the pouring rain I remarked, "That was really nice!" Kayla said, "Oh, that's Sean." No further explanation. Now that we're married, I understand why she didn't explain. To serve happily at every opportunity is the nature of Sean's character.

Months later at the end of February, Kayla was having her birthday party. About a week prior, I had a dream about her party. That man Sean was there. When I woke up, I felt uneasy and I didn't know why. It just seemed weird that I was

having a dream about a man that I didn't know.

When I approached the restaurant for her party, everyone was waiting outside. Sean was standing in the group. I almost turned on my heel and left. It was way too bizarre. I pressed forward and introduced myself to everyone I didn't know. We went inside to eat and went bowling afterwards. It was a decently sized group of people so Sean and I talked here and there. He made a joke about gambling in the Bible that still makes me laugh today. At the end of the night he said it was nice to meet me, and that was it.

After that night, I never saw him again until I was single, despite the fact that he was on staff at our church. But once I became single, I started seeing him around at church and developed a crush from a distance. He had already made an impression on me, so when I turned to my right and saw him at the end of the Young Adults' service, I didn't miss the opportunity to say hello and start a conversation.

A Man of God

Later that night about 30 of us went to eat at Cane's. Afterwards, we formed a giant circle outside of the restaurant and continued talking.

My future wife stood next to me in the circle, and one of our mutual friends next to her.

The three of us wound up breaking off into our own conversation. Our mutual friend was going through a hard time.

This conversation is where Kelsey got my attention. It felt like she and I were working as the perfect team to guide and encourage our friend. I was struck by the wholesome, godly wisdom coming from her mouth –and her smile. She had the most beautiful smile and had the most heartfelt laugh that I

had ever seen and heard; I could tell that she was filled with genuine love for her friend.

At midnight, Kelsey looked at the time and said "Ah! I have work at seven," but pausing for less than a moment, she refocused on us with a big smile and said, "but I just want to stay here and keep talking with y'all!"

By this time, almost everyone else was gone. I realized that by Kelsey saying this that:

Oh! She wants me to make a move!

After a little more conversation, those of us who were left said our goodbyes, and I offered to walk Kelsey to her car.

I asked her for her number, and when she put it into my phone, I finally had her name.

I texted her before I even left the parking lot.

At the time, I was leading a coed Bible study for young adults. One of the girls had invited Kelsey to the group earlier that night at Cane's.

Kelsey and I texted for the few days between the night at Cane's and Bible study. My plan was to watch her during Bible study so that she could reveal her heart for Jesus and I could know whether or not I wanted to go further with her.

A Woman of God

Something I don't talk about a lot when I tell people how Sean and I started dating is how sweet my unexpectedly short time of singleness was. I had almost hurled myself, willingly, down a path of heartache. But God stepped in and stopped it. He rescued me, because He loves me and wants

HIS best for me. I could only marvel at this. The God who sent His Son to die on the cross to give me eternity in Heaven, still moved with compassion to give me something good in my time on earth. Something He ordained.

I saw my life didn't belong to me. It belongs to God. He bought it with a price, and then graciously intervened when I acted as if it was not worthy of that price. There is no greater freedom than trusting God with your life because it *belongs* to Him. I had newfound confidence and peace. I was happy and willing to put it all in God's hands. I felt new, and everything in life was new, and whatever I walked into next, it would be with my Abba at my side.

So that spring evening as the sky turned into a cotton-candy sunset, I left my apartment with child-like excitement. Bible in hand, I walked a few buildings down and found the unit where the group was being held.

A Man of God

After months of meeting in the same apartment for Bible study, Kelsey walked in. I learned that she lived just a few buildings down.

Before Bible study started, we were all sitting around talking, and Kelsey had her Bible open. A lot of the words on the pages were highlighted, and the highlights were several different colors.

One of the girls asked Kelsey, "What do all of the colors mean?"

I overheard Kelsey respond:

"Pink is God's character.

"Yellow is about the Holy Spirit.

"Green is God's promises.

"Orange is how we treat others.

"Peach is context…

"And umm –Oh! Purple is our identity in Christ."

With those last words, I felt my heart catch *fire*. *I had to have this woman.*

After Bible study, a bunch of us walked out to the parking lot together. It was late at night, so the guys left because they had work in the morning. But the girls remained, and I with them.

We had a very fun conversation, and I bided my time until they were all ready to leave.

A Woman of God

When everyone began to head to their cars to leave, Sean graciously offered to walk me back to my apartment. I knew that he would. During Bible study, he impressed me with how humble he was. He led the conversation without overpowering anyone else in the room. People were open to sharing even shameful sins, vulnerably, and I knew it was because of his character. His responses were boldly rooted in the Word of God, but still communicated with love and compassion. He wasn't just an attentive ear, but someone who loves others for their good.

So, as we walked back to my apartment, we walked slowly, taking the sidewalks instead of cutting across the parking lot. I was giddy to be with him, and eagerly anticipating whatever would come next. As we approached my building, he finally asked, "Would you want to go rock climbing with me?" I smiled and asked, "Rock climbing?" It was some-

thing I had never done before, so fitting to how new and exciting everything in my life now felt. I said yes and we checked our calendars and agreed on Saturday. He told me goodnight, and I went inside.

It struck me that night that he didn't ask to come inside. It wouldn't have been appropriate to me for us to be alone in my apartment, and I appreciated that he didn't attempt to. I didn't have to set the boundary –he has since told me it was already there for him. He was honoring me even then, just like God told me he would. And because he made the choice to honor me even so early in our relationship, another prayer I had forgotten about was answered:

He asked me out at my front door.

God brought him there and was faithful to answer even a prayer I had prayed in jest, because He is just that good and loving to His children.

A Man of God

We went rock climbing on our first date, and then I introduced her to pho. We shared our testimonies. I was still trying to figure out exactly where she was in her relationship with God.

For our second date, we went riding bikes downtown. Once the sun set, we got some pizza.

I asked her to pick where we would go for our third date, and she picked bowling.

It was a couple weeks before we could get together, though.

She went out of town to visit her brother. I texted her on her way back, asking how the trip was. She said that she wished that she could have spent more time with her brother because she missed him.

Looking back at our texts, I can see that once she said this, I got a lot more interested. I could tell that she genuinely loved her brother, and I wanted to be loved by a woman who loves genuinely.

The day for our third date came, I picked her up from her house this time. She was ready just a little bit later than we had planned, but I knew that it would be more than worth the wait. And boy was I right!

She was wearing black, and she put some very profitable effort into her hair and makeup, to say the least. I was so distracted by how beautiful she was that I couldn't understand a word that she was saying, and I kept slamming on my brakes because I had such a hard time focusing on my driving!

We got some pasta and then went to the bowling alley. She destroyed me. We had both said that we were bad, but she told me "Wow, when you said that you were bad at bowling, I didn't know that you meant you were *bad* at bowling." I was enthralled.

Loser bought ice cream. On our drive to the ice cream place I asked her to be my girlfriend. She said "Yes," and then asked me what my intentions for dating were.

"To see if I'm going to marry you," I said, "Which seems like a very strong possibility."

A few days later, she was my date to a graduation, and then a crawfish boil. After the crawfish boil, we went to grab some ice cream and walked together on the levee near where I lived. It was a very quiet neighborhood with the city's only view of downtown.

I asked her what her biggest fear was when it came to marriage. She told me that it was being lied to. I assured her that I would not just be honest, but forthcoming. I find comfort in accountability.

She asked me about my biggest fear when it comes to marriage. I told her that it was being neglected. The example that I gave was that most women seem to be very interested in their kids but do not think often of (or think highly of) their husbands. When it comes to divorces, women don't seem to lose a blink of sleep over lost love, but they fight tooth and nail for their children. She assured me that, for her, the husband comes before the children. After all, her dream was marriage.

I had mentioned at some point that I have never gone further than holding hands with a girl, but we were past that point in the conversation. Despite that, without being asked, Kelsey told me that she had given herself away to another man. Her honesty won my trust: I decided at that moment that I was going to marry her.

I drove her back to the church, where her car was parked. We had our first kiss there. Our first three-actually. It felt like 200 mph wind was rushing past my face, and fire and lightning were swimming all around in my body. It was awesome. I swooned each time: She had to bear me on her shoulders between each kiss, to keep me from falling down to the ground.

I was in Christian counseling at the time, and my counselor felt that it would be best if Kelsey and I did not even talk about marriage for at least six months. Leadership at my church agreed. I agreed less every day (and still do), but I held out because I value the input of Church leadership.

What this amounted to was me saying every day, "I really wish I could talk about marriage right now."

"Me too," she would always reply sweetly.

Kelsey and I agreed that at six months we would have a serious conversation: We were going to be transparent about our sexual histories and our expectations for sex in marriage.

The goal was not to get into every detail of our sexual history,

but just to be honest about how guilty we are. We both wanted to be fully loved for who we truly were. And, after all, it was each other that we had sinned against. We were not victims: We sinned willingly, and often happily.

So, 6 months came and we had the conversation. She was in tears as she confessed her sins to me. I responded with warm feelings and a kiss, and I told her that I loved her.

I was in tears as I confessed my sins to her. She responded with warm feelings and a kiss, and she told me that she loved me.

Next, we talked about our expectations for sex in marriage. She made it clear to me that she was happy to take care of all of my needs, wants, and more.

Every day of us dating, I was more excited about life than I had ever been before. Just being with her put me over the moon every second of the day, even when she was not around. But after she said that –I was past Mars!

She was everything that I have ever prayed for and more.

I never knew that anyone could love anyone the way that she loved me.

Every day of us dating, she only proved to me more that she came from God. It was like a fairytale, but better! Something like I never could have imagined.

She was always happy to be with me. She always smiled at me or smiled with me or smiled because she was thinking about me.

She always respected, admired, and forgave me from the deepest part of her heart. She never punished me. She always listened to me. She always apologized when she did wrong.

She didn't read into my words or accuse me of lying. She never

lashed out. She was honest about what she felt, but always held onto hope and believed what God says.

Every little thing that I did for her has made her giddy, and she was giddy to do things for me. There was nothing too life-changingly big or too ridiculously petty and small for me to ask her for (and I have asked her for more than you can imagine). And she has never complained for what she has given, even in her heart.

She wasn't one thing that the world said that she would be:

> She never got bored with me or lazy in our relationship. She only liked me more each day than she did at first; she didn't bring up the past and didn't get frustrated with my habits.
>
> I was able to be my nerdy self around her without being embarrassed –she always saw me as manly, attractive, strong, impressive, and godly.
>
> She did not think or speak badly about me –not to her mom, not to her friends, not in passive-aggressive comments or in fights.
>
> Even when she was on her period, she was never mean to me, and she didn't curse me in her thoughts.
>
> She loved me privately and not just publicly: She wasn't always on her phone when she was around me, and she didn't take pictures with me to make herself look good on Instagram.
>
> She did not dress, cut her hair, do her makeup, or exercise for herself or to impress other women or men –she did what made me and God happy.
>
> She was not too proud to do housework. In fact,

she cooked for me! She didn't make me guess what she wanted from me, but she was more than pleased with me even if I was unable to provide it.

(To be clear, we never lived together or spent the night until our wedding night.)

She was not too proud to be served by me, but accepted all that I do and give with joy and grace.

I got very sick more than once in our short time of dating, and those times were a gift from God. I got to enjoy her company as she drove across town to care for me from sunrise to sundown.

She respected and had compassion for my need for sex, and did all she could to help me, such as dressing modestly.

She was unendingly generous with her time and effort. She helped me with whatever she could. She sweated for me.

She believed me when I told her that she was beautiful, even when she had reasons to believe otherwise. She received my compliments and wore confidence.

She never lied. I didn't have to keep her accountable, although I was welcome to do so: She kept herself accountable to me.

She was made specifically for me.

Yes, she is godly, selfless, beautiful, warm, and fun, but I would think that everyone would want a spouse like that. I did not have a preference for my future wife's race or hair color, but I really wanted her to be tall.

WELL SHE'S LOOONG!

We had the same interests and sense of humor. We had a million little things in common. Our personalities overlapped in ways that no one else's ever had. From day one, I understood the things that she said with her silence that even her own doting mom never had.

We were equally yoked: Imperfect, but on the same page and growing in Jesus at the same pace. But this was a miracle:

Let me start by telling you that I can guarantee that I will silently disagree with at least one thing that anyone says if I can hear them talk for 20 seconds. My best friends might go an afternoon without revealing a divergence in belief to me.

Kelsey and I spent hours talking every day for a year as we prepared to get married. I tried and tried to find one thing to disagree with her on –and found nothing! It was something that only God could have done.

Finally, I found three things that we disagreed on about a month before our wedding, all having to do with raising kids.

It may have taken us 30 seconds to look up a Bible verse, and Disagreement #1 was resolved.

An hour or two of talking and many tears later, we came to a confident agreement for Disagreements #2 and #3.

Several times after Kelsey and I started dating, God's mercy on me drove me to tears:

I wasted years being miserable because I did not

> believe that He would answer my prayer. I sinned against Him by doubting His love for me.
>
> It would have been better for me, at that time, to trust God to answer my prayer and then end up disappointed, because at least that way I would have spent those years being happy.
>
> But in a moment, God forgot all of my stupidity; He was ready to bless me!

For all of my years of deep suffering, Kelsey was not just worth the wait:

> If I had known what I know now, I would have been happy to wait and suffer a million times more –for just one moment of being in the presence of someone who loves me like her.
>
> Even then, she would have been so much more than worth it.

She was all of these things when we were dating, but she is still all of these things, today. Even now, after we have gotten married and gone through many trials.

10. God's Demand & Blessing: First Love

10.1 I Want You to Trust Me

My Sin & Manipulation

A Man of God

Our relationship was wonderful, fiery, and God-centered.

However, I still carried with me the fear—I decided, really—that I would be neglected by her in marriage, just as I have always pictured marriage to be. I was especially haunted by the idea that she would ignore and shame my desire for sex.

Her words and actions were as perfect as they could be, but they were not enough to convince my hard, blind heart.

The only One that I can trust is God, I would tell myself. *She is a human, so she is prone to sin*. Deciding that she would disappoint me was easy for me to justify with my theology. In this way, I wasn't trusting God.

I did not let myself hope for one ounce of love from her. Every minute of the day, without realizing it, I was nursing different ideas about how she would lose interest in me in the future.

This did not start with her. I had been doing this my whole life. I always buried myself for safety into sadness about my future. Expectant hope had never worked for me, and the pain of being disappointed was too great.

And so, what was inside of me came out:

> Even after Kelsey gave me assurance that she would more than take care of me sexually once we got married, I went on to ask her very specific things, very often. I felt that I had to be sure that she would take care of me. She was against talking about it each time, at first, but I pressured her into talking about sex in a way that we should not have. I sinned and caused her to sin.
>
> At the same time, how much we were kissing was really hard on my mind and body. It was very hard for me to not think about sex all day, I could barely understand normal conversations with people throughout the day, and my body was in pain. I knew that we needed to stop kissing as much.
>
> But I wanted, once we were married, for her to remember that I gave her so much affection outside of sex. I was putting it in my pocket to play as a card against her later. If she ever accused me of just wanting her for sex in marriage, I could say "No, don't you remember how much I kissed you even though it was hard for me and my body?"

Then one day, my eyes were opened. I realized that all that I was doing was wrong.

I confessed it to her. Heartbroken, we were both in tears:

"I want you to trust me," she told me.

Those words changed my life more than anything since the day I gave my life to God.

I did not sleep that night. It was the most difficult and painful night of my life.

I never realized how many distrusting thoughts that I was letting get a hold of me.

> I suddenly understood what it meant to "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ."[20] As a man, I always figured that verse was referring to not lusting after women. I have heard woman-preachers talk about "speaking truth to yourself," but I never understood the value of it in fighting sin. Much less, I did not understand that it was the only way to obey God[21] and to love other believers from my heart.[22]
>
> Truth is not the reality that humans see, it's the reality that God sees.[23]

For the first time, I was rejecting those thoughts and speaking truth to myself.

It felt like peeling off my own skin as my skin fought to grab back onto me. My mind was not cooperative with the idea of choosing to trust Kelsey. Negative thoughts just kept on coming.

I had awful panic attacks like I had never experienced before. For the next few months, I would continue to wake up in the middle of the night and have these panic attacks. They made

20 2 Corinthians 10:15

21 Joshua 1:9

22 Revelation 12:10; Job 1:9-11

23 2 Corinthians 11:17

me feel like I would be trapped in my head forever. I was afraid that I might become unable to speak, stuck in a chair in a mental hospital, drooling.

But this first night, God revealed a lot to me about how a Christian marriage should work.

Needs & Humility

At this point in our relationship, Kelsey and I were reading *The Four Laws of Love*, by Pastor Jimmy Evans. This book repeatedly said that men and women have unique needs in a marriage.

For husbands, it was basically:

Honor

Sex

Partnership

Domestic Support

For wives, it was basically:

Sacrifice

Open Communication

Nonsexual Affection

Relationship-Care Leadership

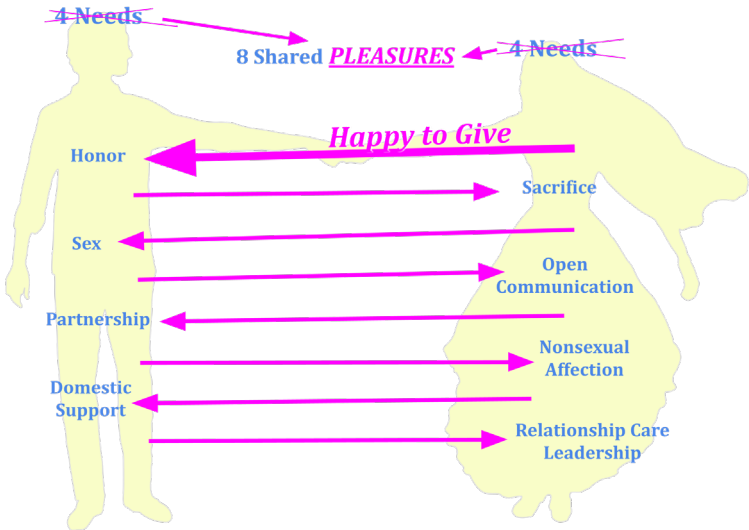
It drove me crazy to no end that the book listed "Sex" as a need for men and "Nonsexual Affection" as a need for women. I was thrilled at the idea of giving nonsexual affection, but the idea of being stifled for sex because I have not proved myself

made me feel helpless and unloved. Hints as to why I tried to manipulate Kelsey in the way that I did.

It clicked for me this night that there were, not "4 Needs" for a man and "4 Needs" for a woman, but **only** 8 **shared pleasures**.

Kissing Kelsey on the cheek, for example, was something that I wanted to do. I didn't do it because it was a "Need" for her, but I enjoyed it –so much! I dreamed my whole life of kissing her, holding her hand, and buying her flowers. It was my pleasure!

In the same way, although there are many women in the world who are chained by Satan's deceptions, Kelsey was (and is) always happy to make love with me, her husband. She doesn't do it just to meet my needs, but she meets all of my needs and more, because she enjoys it, and she wants to.



Jesus came so that we "may have life, and have it in abundance."[24] A life of only receiving is not a rich life. You could

24 John 10:10

have all the money in the world and yet still be empty because of being a selfish person. A satisfying life is a life of both loving and being loved.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."[25]

The Bible does not often use the word "selfish," and it actually never uses the word "selfless." It often uses the words "proud," and "humble."

God does not deny our needs –He cares about them![26] But He will not accept us putting our needs above the needs of others. Humility is not denying that you have worth, but it's valuing others above yourself.[27]

I should meet my wife's needs whether or not she meets mine. If my wife, in sin, refuses sex to me, then God still requires me to sacrifice for her, give her affection, and so on.

In the same way, if, in sin, I don't meet her needs, God still requires her to honor me, meet my sexual needs, and so on.

> "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the Christian message, they may be won over without a message by the way their wives live when they observe your pure, reverent lives."[28]

If this command applies to women who are married to non-believing men, then it applies even more if they are married to believing men.[29]

And if it applies to wives, then it applies to husbands,[30] as it

25 Acts 20:35

26 1 Peter 5:7

27 Philippians 2:3-8

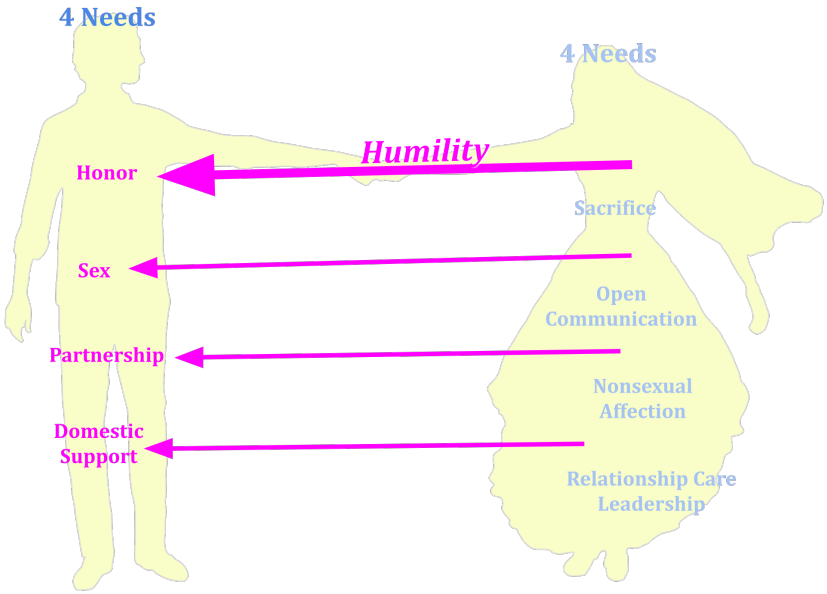
28 1 Peter 3:1-2

29 1 Peter 2:18; 1 Timothy 6:2

30 Matthew 23:11; 1 Corinthians 7:4; Ephesians 5:21, 25

does to all believers:

"Love your enemies."



And if I am happy to meet all of her needs? Then great! She can joyfully accept that.

God still requires her to first put my needs before her own:

"Consider others as greater than yourself."[31]

This way, we are both fully satisfied.

Trust

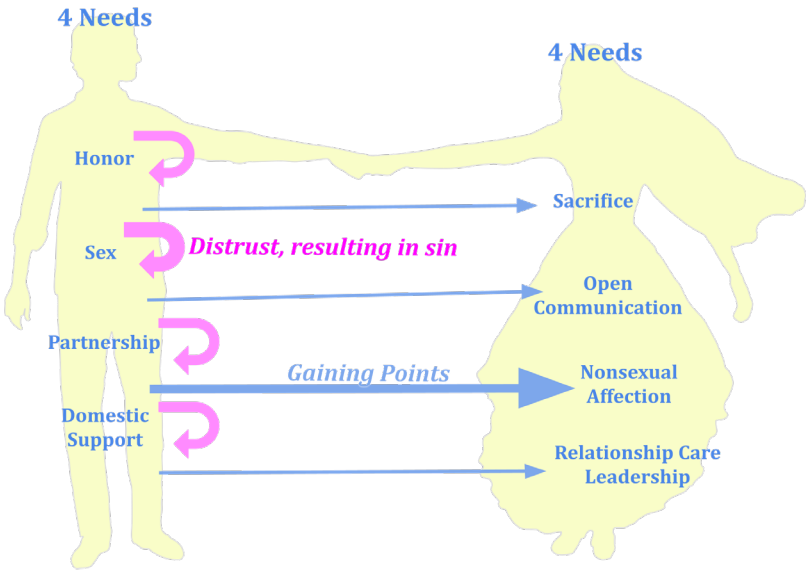
Trust is the key, and the thing that was missing which kept me

31 Philippians 2:3

from really loving Kelsey. I put her before myself, but I did not trust her to do the same.

I expected that Kelsey would eventually get tired of taking care of my sexual needs, or that she would eventually want me to earn it from her.

And without an expectation that she would fulfill my needs, I was left with only one option to fulfill my needs: sin.



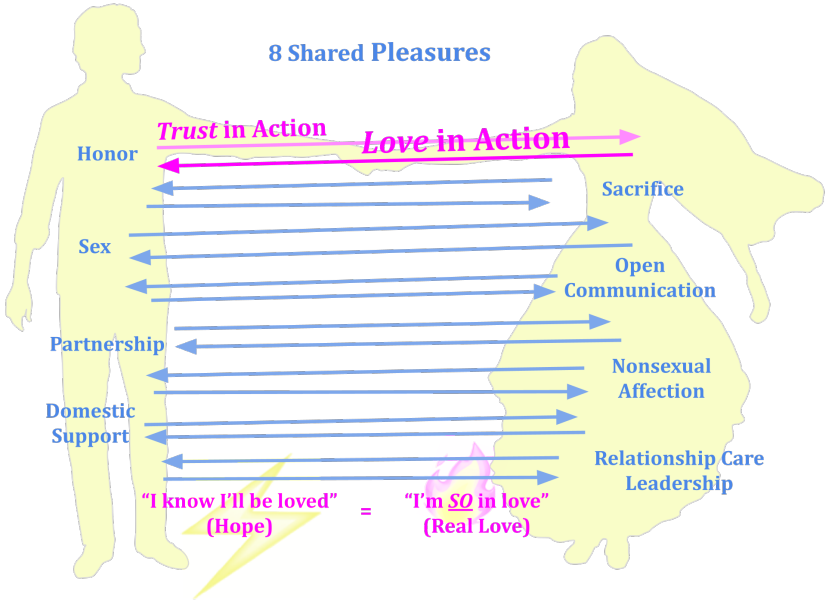
Because I did not trust her to meet my needs, I did good things for her to try and earn the right to have my needs met.

Not that I ever expected to actually use my points to force her to have sex with me. Being comfortable with having more points, I probably would have just pouted or tried to make her feel guilty. How awful for me to do that to the woman who I claim to love!

And since I was serving for points, I could not serve her in love. You cannot love and earn points at the same time. My "good" actions were actually sins.

***Points* is a system where you do good things or count up the good things that you have done in order to claim that others owe you, and you pay for the bad things that you have done with good things. You refuse to ask for things that you want and pretend not to want things so you can save your points up, and the more that you suffer, the more points that you have.**

I sinned against Kelsey as King Saul and the Pharisees sinned against God,[32] giving her sacrifices that she did not ask for, ignoring what she really wanted (which in this case would have been to help ease my sexual burden).



32 1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 9:13

It was making the choice to trust Kelsey to take care of all of my sexual wants and needs which made the biggest difference in my fight against masturbation.

Why would I masturbate when I have something infinitely better waiting for me in just 5 months?[33] And someone who is more than happy to give it to me?

This gave me incredible strength against temptation. Even when my body was dying for sex, it felt like hardly a temptation at all.

The truth is that I could have had this strength my whole life. If I would have chosen to believe that God would give me the woman that I was praying for, instead of doubting and worrying, then temptation would have been a much smaller problem.

That being said, there was one more thing that I needed to learn before I became fully free from masturbation (and lust altogether), which I will explain in the next section of this chapter, "Not me, but the sinful nature."

God's Needs & Ours

I stayed up all night the next night, too:

> I realized that I was doing the same thing in my relationship with God that I was doing in my relationship with Kelsey.

Now, God does not have "needs." He is going to get His glory whether-or-not we give it to Him willingly:

> "Every knee will bow."[34]

33 2 Corinthians 4:17

34 Isaiah 45:23

He does not depend on anything else to sustain His power, to live, or to exist.[35] God is always secure in His own identity, no matter how we treat Him. He doesn't need you to tell Him that He's worthy for Him to know.

But, in a way, God does have needs:

> God needs to love. For example, emotionally speaking, He cannot stand to not put His love into action.[36] That is why He sent Jesus to die, and it may be why He created the world. God is love and He is good, so just as He cannot lie, He cannot not love.
>
> These needs, which I am about to list, are what God needs to feel loved by you, or they are what He needs/requires you to give in order to sustain a relationship with Him.
>
> The proof is that God has emotions. Emotions are a response to desires. God has often been shown to be angry, the Holy Spirit grieves,[37] Jesus is recorded rejoicing[38] and crying.[39]
>
> God is emotionally hurt when we do not love Him, despite the fact that He is 100% secure in who He is.

Just like a husband and wife have needs that can only be met by each other, there are desires of God that can only be met by your willing obedience to Him –and only God can meet any of our needs!

> There are many ways that you can divide it, but I

35 Acts 17:24-25

36 Hosea 11:8-9

37 Ephesians 4:30

38 Luke 10:21

39 John 11:35

based this on how Jesus taught us to pray:

Our needs would be:

Provision on Earth (This includes Prosperity)

> "Give us today our daily bread." (This is ultimately fulfilled by Heaven. Our daily bread is anything that enables us to live, but many have died. Maybe they didn't literally starve, but God stopped protecting them from death.)

Forgiveness

> "Forgive us of our sins…"

Guidance/Strength

> "Don't lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil…"

God's needs would be:

Obedience

> "May your kingdom come, and your will be done, here on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Glory

> "…Your Name is holy."

Forgiveness to Others

> "…As we forgive those who sin against us."

The Bible does not distinguish between "wants" and "needs." God does not ever shame anyone for wanting "too much."

Hannah was broken because she was childless, and her husband said:

> "Why won't you eat? Why are you troubled? Am I not better to you than 10 sons?"[40]

He was absolutely right! A husband is better than 10 sons.

But what did God say? Was it:

> "Why won't you eat? Why are you troubled? Am I not better to you than 100 sons?"

No! God did not say that! Although He certainly would have been right to. Instead:

> "The Lord paid attention to Hannah's need, and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters."[41]

It's worth noting that Hannah gave her firstborn son back to God. In the same way, so long as we have submitted all of our wants and needs to God, He is happy to give us everything that we want and more!

> "The Lord is my shepherd;
> I shall not want.
> He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
> He leads me beside the still waters.
> He restores my soul;
> He leads me in the paths of righteousness
> For His name's sake.
> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

40 1 Samuel 1:8b

41 1 Samuel 2:21a

I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
"You prepare a table before me in the presence of
my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever."[42]

It's very clear, looking at the context of this whole Psalm, that David is not singing about God being all that He needs (despite the alternate translation of "shall not want" in many modern translations, in a day when Stoic beliefs are so widespread).

David is singing about trusting God to take care of his needs, in David's future –like a shepherd who leads his sheep to food and water. And not just to take care of his needs:

"My cup runs over."[43]

God is all that we need, according to His own definition: because He gives us all that we need.

Although, yes, salvation through Jesus is the truest Bread because He is what we crave most on Earth (more than any food or dream). He makes us right with God through His Flesh. We will "never be thirsty" because He is a spring within us that continues to give us strength and guidance.[44]

And, yes, God wants us to love Him more than His gifts and even our own lives.[45]

42 Psalm 23

43 Psalm 23:5d

44 John 6:27-35; John 4:13-14

45 Luke 14:26

Sonship & Points

In a lot of ways, I was not loving God by my submission to Him –I was living as a slave.

A slave is someone who submits to God but does not expect anything from God. I was putting God before myself, but I was not expecting God to bless me:

> "Yeah, God. I'll go to church, pray every night, put others before me, and wait until marriage for sex, but…
>
> "I don't really know if You will ever speak to me or give me a wife. In fact, You probably won't."

Sometimes I would even wonder if I really would make it to Heaven. Instead of Heaven, I chose to take solace in the fact that God would get all that He wanted in the end. The Bible actually argues directly against this:

> "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."[46]

Although this appeared to be humility, it was not love, and it prevented me from really loving God. You have to be loved by God in order to love Him.[47]

Faith without works is dead,[48] but works without faith (and affection) are also dead.[49]

46 1 Corinthians 15:32

47 1 John 4:19

48 James 2:26

49 Galatians 5:6b; Romans 12:9a

What I was really doing (by not expecting anything from God) was trying to rack up points with Him:

> "See God, I did all of these things, and I did it without even needing anything from you."
>
> Or, as the older brother said in the parable of the prodigal son:
>
> "All these years I have slaved for you, and you haven't even given me a young goat for me and my friends."

Think about what the Father says:

> "Everything that I have is yours."

All that the son had to do was ask!

But instead, the son decided to keep his mouth shut and not ask for a thing. Resentment built up over years because he refused to ask and tried to earn his father's approval.

The proof is the very fact that the son decided to bring up all that he had done for his father.

It was not for love; it was for points! This was Martha's sin.[50]

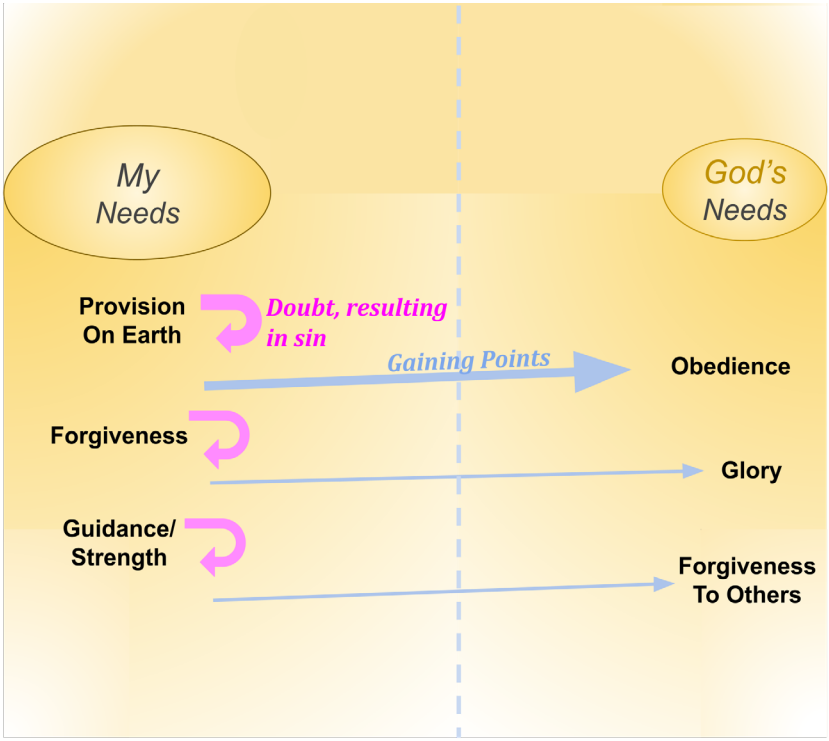
In the same way, many will do this to Jesus on the day of judgment:

> "On that day many will say to Me,
>
> > 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?'
>
> "Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you!

50 Luke 10:38-42

Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!'"[51]

All of the older son's work turned to bitterness. It was not love: it was sin!



You cannot do anything for love and for points at the same time:

> You can't love and try to make up for your wrongs at the same time.
>
> > Buying flowers for my wife so that she won't be angry at me for forgetting her birthday is not love.

51 Matthew 7:21-23

Buying flowers for my wife in case
I do something wrong is not love.

It's earning points.

(This is why forgiving yourself is so
important).

You can't love and earn/demand credit for the good things that you have done at the same time.

Buying flowers for my wife so that
she would feel more inclined to
have sex with me is not love.

Buying flowers for my wife just in
case I need a favor later is not love.

Getting angry at her for denying
me for sex after buying her flowers
is not love.

It's points.

You can't love your believing wife and be silent about your own needs at the same time.

You can only resent her as the old-
er brother resented his father –and
count up all of the "selfless" things
that you did for her while you suf-
fered by your own choice.

Love only gives freely. This is because love receives freely.

I don't have to pray every day to go to Heaven. In fact, I don't even have to not murder people to please God. God's love is a gift freely given, regardless of our sin. He desired me –died for me –even

while I was murdering.

I don't have to buy my wife flowers for her to have sex with me. In fact, I can be unkind to her. Her love is a gift freely given. She loves me, even when I don't love her.

It's because Kelsey loves me like this that I am free to love her.

I don't have to earn her forgiveness, earn her favors, or guilt her into doing the "fair" thing.

Her love is not fair. If it were fair, then it wouldn't be love.

I know that my wife will give, and give. And give…and give, and give and give!

There is no limit to what I can ask of her which she would not be happy to give.

So, I am free to do the same thing.

I don't have to buy her flowers for sex. She is always happy to give me everything that I want and more.

I can buy her flowers because I want to buy her flowers, and chocolate. And run my hands through her hair…and do the dishes for her, and compliment her, and –

–Really, at what point should I stop?

I have nothing to gain by doing sweet things for her and nothing to lose by neglecting her. The only reason that I have left to do anything for her is:

Love.

So, all that I do at this point is love, if I choose to believe in her love.

And if it is really love, then it is like her love, which gives without limit:

> All that she asks, and more.

This is the love which Jesus commanded:

> "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."[52]

Notice that Jesus did not say:

> "Do **not** unto others as you would **not** have them do to you."[53]
>
> > I don't want my wife to chop off my fingers.
> >
> > I do want back rubs. In fact, there is never a moment when I would not like a back rub from my wife.
>
> If I lived under the "do not" command, then if my wife complained about me not rubbing her back, I could say, "I didn't chop off your fingers! What right do you have to complain?"
>
> But under Jesus' command, I am to do what I would want done unto me. This would mean that I would rub her back even without her asking, every chance that I got. As often as she would like it, I would do it. If she never stops liking it, then I never stop doing it.
>
> There is no "least that you can do" when it comes to love. Love demands the most that you can do, all the time. Otherwise, it is not love.

52 Matthew 7:12

53 Confucius (China), 5th century BC; Hillel the Elder (Judea), ~110 BC-10 AD

To many, this may seem like a big burden. To me, it is not at all a burden.

Because I have stopped keeping track of the score, I find myself feeling as if my life is only receiving:

> I forget the good things that I have done for her,[54]
> so that I can become free to think of all that she
> has done for me.

I spend most of my time thinking of all that I want her to do for me… with excitement and expectation!

How did David say it?

> "My cup overflows."[55]

I am free to think about all of the most wonderful ways that I could imagine to bless her.

And there is no pressure to imagine. Otherwise, it would not be love. Instead, I am free to rest and receive whatever I ask of her. But love compels me to imagine, if indeed I am loving in humility and hope.

Hope & the Pleasure of Giving

Hope is the bridge between faith and love.

In today's English, we don't usually use the word "hope" to mean the same thing as "hope" means in the Bible.

"Hope" in the Bible means "excitement," to simplify.

Hope is the difference between "worth it" and "more than worth it."

54 Matthew 6:3

55 Psalm 23:5

You would pay $5 for a chicken sandwich. But you wouldn't run into Chick Fil A, slam the $5 bill onto the counter, and start dancing in excitement as you waited for the sandwich.

But what if you knew that your meal came with a winning lottery ticket, worth billions?

Dancing at the counter wouldn't seem so weird.

> "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field."[56]

Now, I can't speak for you, but imagine me:

> A woman promised me, and gave me a very good reason to believe, that I had just won the lottery for everything I could want and more in sex, along with her adoring eyes, obedience, a best friend, endless meals, and much more.
>
> What could cost me so much that it is even worth comparing to what I have gained? Why would I hold onto the nickels and dimes which I have earned when I have billions arriving tomorrow? It costs me nothing to spend all that I have on her!
>
> You want me to buy you flowers? Sure! You want me to rub your back? Why not! I am more than taken care of.
>
> All that I own now is nothing but spare change: my time, my money, my effort –everything!
>
> The hope of her love drove me to be excited through even the most grueling task and the longest waits. I considered them easy and short.

56 Matthew 13:44

Consider Jesus' promise to the man on the cross:

> "Today, you will be with Me in **Paradise**."[57]

I don't know exactly what "***Paradise***" means, but I know that it is better than anything that I can experience on Earth.

It's better than a wife who will give you an unlimited lifetime supply of the best sex, food, service, and warmth. Better than a wife who never stops being excited by you or seeing you as the biggest blessing in her life.

It's better than billions of dollars.

What could cost me so much that it is even worth comparing to what I have gained? Why would I hold onto the nickels and dimes which I have earned when I have billions arriving tomorrow? It costs me nothing to spend all that I have on God!

You want me to be patient with others? Sure! You want me to be tortured to death? Why not! I am more than taken care of.

All that I own now is nothing but spare change: my time, my money, my effort, my identity –everything!

The hope of His love drives me to be excited[58] through even the most grueling tasks[59] and the longest waits.[60] I consider them easy[61] and short.[62]

The selfish hope of Heaven is supposed to drive us to passionate love for God. This is especially true for men, in my experience.

57 Luke 23:43

58 James 1:2-3

59 John 16:21

60 Genesis 29:20

61 Matthew 11:30

62 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Do not get caught up in your theology about what you think that Heaven will be like. What would it harm you to imagine your most selfish dreams coming true? Will you be disappointed when you finally arrive?

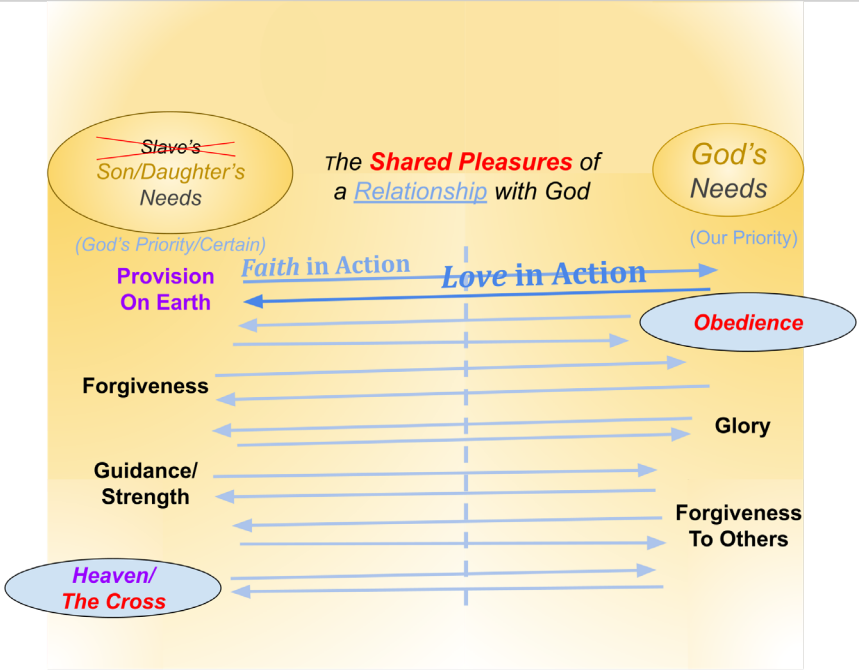
Of course not!

In the same way, we should pray and expect for prosperity on Earth.[63]

If you're disappointed? Good! That means that you had faith!

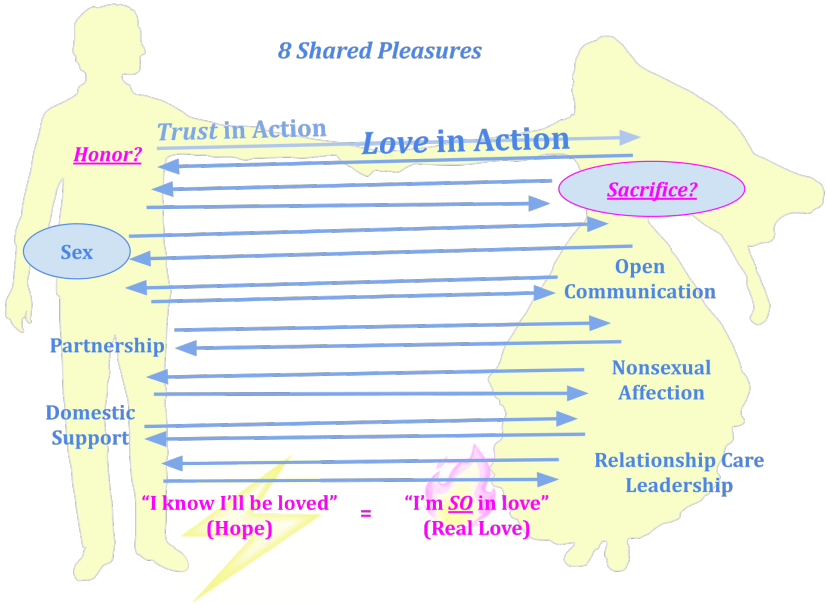
But if you keep putting your hope in God's love for you, I can guarantee you that you will not be disappointed in the end.

Both Joseph and Stephen got their happy ending on Earth, even though their lives ended very differently.



63 Philippians 4:19; Notice that the context confirms that this verse is promising earthly prosperity.

This is because both giving and receiving are pleasures in a relationship with God, just as they are in a marriage.



It can and should be a man's pleasure to make sacrifices for his wife. It's not even uncommon for an evil man, early in a relationship with a woman who he adores, to do something like give his jacket to her on a cold night –and happily endure the cold himself.

Jesus said it this way:

> "It's more blessed to give than to receive."[64]

In the same way, a man should be happy to sacrifice anything for his wife, no matter how long they have been together. No

64 Acts 20:35

matter how big or small. From doing the dishes to throwing away his video game console, and above.

It can and should be our pleasure to make sacrifices for God. No matter how big or small. From waking up early to pray to dying on a cross.

Paul said it this way:

> "My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead."[65]

We can and should trust God to answer each and every one of our prayers, as we pray them.[66]

But our **goal** is to love God.

> "...We rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, [and] endurance produces proven character…[67]

If you pray tonight for healing, and you are not healed, then just believe that He will answer your prayer tomorrow night, when you pray. Don't beg God; Just ask Him once.[68]

If God tells you that He is not taking a problem away from you soon; then Satan will shift his focus into tempting you to deny God's words[69] –or taking your faith to keep hoping through that disappointment.[70] If you simply ask, and nothing happens

65 Philippians 3:10-11

66 Psalm 27:13

67 Romans 5:3-4a

68 Matthew 6:7-8

69 Matthew 16:21-23

70 John 16:33

the first time, that is God telling you "No" for today. Live tomorrow rejoicing that you suffered well for Christ today.

Honestly, be happy because you will not have the opportunity in heaven to do this for Him. Thank God that He gives you any chance to serve Him at all.

And even if you do get the short end of the stick as far as "receiving"-type blessings on Earth, the reward of Heaven is a selfish blessing not even worth comparing to what you have lost.

If God, with all knowledge, were to make the sole purpose of the world your happiness—yes, just your happiness and fun (and not His glory, righteousness, or the happiness of anyone else)—then not a thing would change. Right now, you are given the opportunity to be the most blessed that you can be—and to have a future that is better than you can imagine. None of us are waiting in vain.

A Woman of God

It can and should be a woman's pleasure to obey her husband.

One day when we were dating, Sean told me about a box. He had a box that he had been putting money in for a few years. When would he put money in it? Everytime he made extra money from side jobs or someone from church felt generous and gave him some cash. He said God told him to start saving for a ring, years before we met. He said once he bought my ring, if there was any money leftover, I could have it- he felt it all belonged to me anyway.

I've never heard of a man in his early twenties saving money to buy a ring for a wife he hasn't even met. But because God told him to, his heart was set on me: his bride. Whatever

money that took was more than worth it to him.

Now think of Jesus preparing for and enduring the cross. Where was His heart set? God's plan from the fall in the garden was to bring us back into the fold of His grace. He gave us His best in His Son Jesus Christ because He saw us as worthy of whatever it cost. He wanted *us*, with a desire so great that He sacrificed His all and conquered Hell and Death, because we belong to Him.

There is no greater romance than this.

This is why we take communion, to remember His body that was broken and His blood that was poured out. And what was His prize? Me, a sinner, wearing filthy rags and covered in crimson stains. But graciously, in His loving-kindness and tender mercy, He washed me white as snow. He made me a new creation and adopted me as His Daughter. This is why I so often weep when I take communion. God loved me so much He sacrificed all He had to give just to have me and make me His.

How could I not give Him my all in return? My adoration, my worship, my obedience, my time, and my whole life. There is nothing to be gained by keeping anything to myself. In fact, I have lived experiences from my life before I turned to Christ that serves as nothing but evidence that without Him, I am desperately and hopelessly lost. But giving my all to Him, I have a safe, faithful, and secure love.

Is this not the image of marriage that we are given in Ephesians 5:

"*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to*

make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. ***To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband***."[71]

But oh, how the enemy would love for us to believe that there is still some amount of control we need to keep for ourselves. Surely, we do not need to submit in *everything*. Our husbands are, in fact, only human. Sometimes we may be able to see something they don't. Right?

Whenever I talk to a believing woman who is newly married, she almost always shares that submitting to her husband is harder than she expected. We know the verse in Ephesians 5, but when it comes to walking it out, our flesh can be so weak. Sometimes it seems safer to not submit, or our way just makes more *sense*. When a woman tells me this, I have a story from a month before Sean and I got married that I share:

We were getting the apartment that we would be living in together after we got married ready. I was living with my mom, so a lot of my things from when I had my own apartment were in a storage shed at her house. Sean had come over to start bringing the boxes to our soon-to-be home. This shed was prone to hornet and wasp infestations. Once we started moving things out, the hornets got stirred up. Since I had helped my mom with moving things in and out

71 Ephesians 5:22-23 NKJV

of this shed numerous times over the years, I quickly retrieved the wasp and hornet spray and started spraying.

That's when Sean told me to go wait inside and that he would finish up so I wouldn't get stung.

I didn't go inside immediately. Instead, I stood by the back door of my mom's house and watched Sean's process. He would take a box, bring it to the end of the driveway where the car was parked, leave the box outside the car, then go retrieve the next box from the shed. I wanted to be helpful and thought things would go so much faster if I could put the boxes in the car while he continued to unload the shed. And besides, I reasoned to myself, he told me to go inside so I won't get stung, and the hornets are in the shed- not by the car.

So I went to the car and started loading up boxes. I managed to get exactly two boxes in the car when I felt the sting. I screamed, and Sean rushed me inside. As he tended to my stung and swollen ankle, he explained something he knew that I didn't when he told me to go inside: hornets can remember and recognize faces. Since I was the one who had sprayed the nest, he knew that any who were out would immediately go to sting me. It happened exactly like he knew it would, the hornet went from the shed to the end of the driveway, completely bypassing Sean, to sting me.

We joked about the hornets seeking vengeance for their fallen brothers, but this was actually my first practical lesson in submission to my husband (even though we were a few weeks away from being husband and wife).

I knew he wanted to keep me safe from the hornets, but I still tried to reason my way out of obeying what he said. I thought I saw something he didn't, when really it was the opposite. I don't need to see the whole picture to obey- I just need to trust.

In our marriages, in our relationship with God, there is safety in trusting, willing, and happy obedience, and in that safety, there is true intimacy and love.

When I got saved, I read the story of Adam and Eve more times than I can count. Even though it was not a new story to me, I saw it in a whole new light. What God wanted from His creation with man was intimacy. He dwelled in the Garden with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve walked with Him, fully provided for and taken care of-naked and unashamed.

But to have the intimacy He desired, God also wanted Adam and Eve's trust:

"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.'"[72]

When the serpent enters the scene, he doesn't tempt Eve with the fruit, or even wisdom, but with doubt:

"Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You can't eat from any tree in the garden?"'

"'The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, "You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die."'

"'No! You will certainly not die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes

72 Genesis 2:16-17 NKJV

will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"[73]

Did God really say you can't eat from any tree in the garden? Doubt. You will not certainly die. More doubt. In fact, God knows that when you eat you will be like Him. Eve followed this path of doubt to the only conclusion it could offer: I can't trust God to give me what I need, so I need to take it for myself.

Eve stopped trusting God, and we see the immediate consequence of sin is the loss of intimacy with God.

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'

"And he said, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.'"[74]

Adam and Eve were afraid of God and hid. We eventually see God send them away from the Garden, but they have already fallen out of love with Him. They are in the Garden of Eden where they are meant to dwell in unashamed safety and paradise, yet they are ashamed. Afraid. Hiding. Their death began when they chose not to obey in trust.

After Eve is created in Genesis 2, the last verse reads:

73 Genesis 3:1-5 NKJV

74 Genesis 3:8-10 NKJV

"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. Both the man and his wife were naked yet felt no shame."[75]

God's original plan for marriage is similar to His original plan for His own relationship with man in the Garden: intimacy, oneness, and unashamed nakedness. God made us for intimacy that requires trust. This is why I submit to God, and consequently submit to my husband. I am safe in that obedience. There is nothing I need to attain for myself, and if I try, all I can gain is loss of intimacy.

A Man of God

If you have lost sight of the fact that serving God or your spouse is more than worth it, then you have, for the moment, fallen out of love.

Willingness & Sweating Blood

But what if serving God (or your spouse) is too hard to do happily?

We cannot deny that joy is a command in the Bible. So to leave joy behind is a sin.

But, think about Jesus: He did not seem especially happy to die on the cross on the night before His death. Not in the moment, anyway. But it was His joy, since He has received us as His reward.[76]

Consider what Jesus said and did right before He died:

75 Genesis 2:24-25

76 Isaiah 53:11

He loved his disciples to the very end, not shying away from serving them.[77]

He kept His eye on His reward.[78]

He kept telling those around Him to obey God.[79]

He prayed.

He remembered His love, for the Father and for us.[80]

He did not complain.[81]

He cried out for God to forgive those who were, in that moment, spitting on Him, mocking Him, insulting Him, and literally torturing and killing Him.[82]

Obeying God **this way** (not leaning[83] on resentment, as Job did[84]) was very difficult for Him; so difficult that He sweated blood.[85]

And if you are obeying God, from within your heart outwards to your words and actions, you may sometimes sweat blood, too. It is our responsibility to behave as Jesus did in the hours leading to His death.

Willingness does not always feel like joy, but it believes what joy believes when the flesh wants you to quit, complain, lash

77 John 13:1-5
78 Hebrews 12:2
79 Matthew 26:41
80 Matthew 26:42
81 Isaiah 53:7
82 Luke 23:34
83 Romans 13:14b
84 Job 42:3, 6
85 Luke 22:44

out, numb yourself, distance yourself, or demand a return.

Willingness is believing what God says and pushing through to joy. Willingness doesn't stop fighting until there is joy.

Sometimes you might have to sweat blood for something that should be easy, like being happy to kiss your wife on the cheek.

More often, you may sweat blood for something hard, like loving someone who is rude to you while you are sick and loaded down with responsibilities.

God still holds you responsible for your actions and gives you the power to obey Him. He will not excuse you just because it is hard. You love Him or you don't.[86] He will not excuse you from what He requires of you just because it's harder than what He's requiring from the people around you.[87]

I sweated a lot of blood the night after Kelsey told me "I want you to trust me." Taking captive my thoughts was not easy or natural.

Yet, I consider all of the pain to be nothing because I fought to consider it as such.

> "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it."[88]
>
> "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[89]
>
> "Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his

86 John 14:15

87 John 21:18-22

88 Matthew 16:24-25

89 Matthew 11:30

love for her."[90]

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."[91]

"This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers."[92]

I Can't Help What I Feel

A Woman of God

God had put the desire in my heart to be a wife and to serve my husband happily at every opportunity. It was easy for me. When I heard or saw the disdain other women had for their husbands, whether in-person or in the media, I didn't understand how anyone could act or feel that way towards the man they vowed to spend their lives with.

In fact as newlyweds, when I was asked about married life, I only had one word to describe it: *wonderful*. Of the dozens of women that I talked to often, only one ever agreed with me, with the general sentiment being "It won't last."

It broke my heart. I could not wrap my head around how anyone could feel that way, and so freely express that was how they felt.

For a long time I thought not being "in my flesh" had to do

90 Genesis 29:20

91 Daniel 3:17-18 (NLT)

92 1 John 3:16

with what I was feeling. All of those women who expressed disdain for their husbands were "in the flesh" to me because I was hearing what they were feeling. To my mind, I didn't feel that way so I was not "in my flesh." As newlyweds, I had no reason to think otherwise. God had given me grace in that my feelings aligned with what He had revealed to me about His heart for marriage.

Then we had our first child.

With postpartum hormones and stress began the onslaught of thoughts and feelings towards my husband I had never had before: criticism, annoyance, frustration, impatience, and an aversion to his affection. My thoughts and feelings became hostile to my husband.

It was incredibly disturbing to me how the wife I thought I was could change overnight. I knew everything I was feeling and thinking was wrong, but I couldn't get it to stop, even though I prayed in earnest:

God, please take away this spirit of criticism and hostility towards my husband.

God, please help me be steadfast in my patience and love for him.

God, please let me want to be close to him and touched by him as if we were on our honeymoon again.

God, please help me. I don't want to feel this way anymore.

I felt like I was fighting a battle I couldn't win. All of those women were right. It doesn't last. I couldn't stop everything I was thinking and feeling and it made me so ashamed. That shame left me utterly powerless.

One day, I let the thoughts and feelings out. I snapped at Sean in a moment of frustration. I was sarcastic and conde-

scending. It was entirely dishonoring to him. I knew it was wrong, and the tears began to flow as I accepted that this is the wife I now was.

Except, I didn't have to be.

Those thoughts and feelings didn't make me who I was until I *chose to submit* to them in my heart. With that submission came action, which in this case was dishonoring my husband. I couldn't completely help what I was thinking and feeling, but with the power of the Holy Spirit I can help what I *choose* in my heart and how I act.

In our marriage, Sean and I have come to check each other on this by asking, "What are you holding onto?" This question shifts our focus from whatever our current feeling or circumstance is and directs it to the God that our lives belong to.

- Do you wait until you are on the other side of a trial for joy, or do you praise God through it?

- Does your obedience align to your whims and instant gratification, or does it require faith?

- Do you trust the Lord with all your heart, or are you setting your own path, sowing to your flesh, reaping your corruption?

In that moment of dishonoring him, I wasn't holding onto any hope that God could or would help me or empower me to act contrary to what I was thinking and feeling. The fact that my thoughts and feelings could have changed so easily made me feel weak, so I allowed myself to become so overrun with shame that I believed I had no power at all.

"I'm fighting a battle I can't win," was what I was holding onto.

I had to make a *choice* to hold onto God's truth contrary to what my thoughts and feelings said.

This is sweating blood. Taking every thought captive the way Sean had the night I told him I wanted him to trust me was something I had never had to do in our relationship until I was postpartum.

This didn't make me weak. In fact, it was God giving me the opportunity to be strong in Him by choosing to love even when it is not easy.

Let me rephrase: God was giving me the opportunity to be strong in Him by choosing to love even though it was really, really, really hard. My circumstances were unavoidable: postpartum hormones, the stress of caring for a newborn with colic, lack of sleep, and the loneliness of being home all day.

Despite my earnest prayers to change my circumstances, God allowed them so that I could bear more fruit as a Christian, and as a wife:

"*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*"[93]

If I only choose to think tenderly about my husband when I feel like it or when it is easy, where is the fruit in that? Can I claim to truly love him?

In this case, my husband didn't do anything wrong, so it is probably easy to see that I was wrong to be hostile to him. Being hostile to someone who hasn't done anything wrong isn't "fair". But the inverse is also easy to accept as true:

Loving someone who is hostile to you is also not "fair"—but that is exactly the example we see in Christ. To love like

93 John 15:2 NKJV

Christ is to love *especially* when it is not fair.

Jesus didn't sweat blood the night before going to the cross for the crowds that shouted "Hosanna!", but for the crowds that would shout "Crucify him!" Sweating blood to love when it is most difficult is what makes love real. That is how we love like Christ.

So that means if my husband were to mistreat me, I would be in sin to hold onto feelings of resentment, bitterness, or anger. No matter how poorly he loves me, as a believer washed in the blood of the Lamb and equipped by the Holy Spirit, I have to choose to hold onto what God says is love and *choose to act* in that way. A way that:

Lays down my own life and dies to myself,

Gives happily, without the expectation for anything in return,

Suffers long and is kind,

Rejoices in truth,

Bears and endures,

Believes and hopes,

And does not fail. Even if—and especially when—others fail to love me.

My thoughts and feelings, no matter how good or bad, do not make me who I am, but what I choose to hold onto and believe. This is true considering all of my relationships, even my relationship with God.

I know God is my Healer, but it is still normal for me to

have feelings of fear when I get a bad health diagnosis.

That just means every time I feel that fear I have the opportunity to choose:

- Do I hold onto that fear and despair for my future?
- Or do I hold onto hope that God will heal me—and even if He doesn't—He is good and will take care of me?

If I choose the former, I am a helpless slave to my flesh.

If I choose the latter, I am a Daughter of God as I am led by His Spirit.

Points Language

A Man of God

In the course of us dating, God enabled Kelsey and I to identify "points" language. If I said one of these words while in conflict, then I knew that I was in the flesh.

If she said one of these words while in conflict, then she knew that she was in the flesh.

There is no way to list every possible "points" word, so hopefully you get the gist by the time I am done. These words show that we are not giving/receiving willingly and freely:

"Have to"

Do you *have to* say "yes" to sex with your spouse every time? According to the Bible, yes.[94]

But if you have asked that question in the first place, then

94 1 Corinthians 7:5

you have already missed it. In fact, even if you do what you are obligated to do, then you are still in sin.

Wife or husband, who wants to have sex with someone who sees it as an obligation? Have you ever gotten a gift from someone and then heard them complain about how much it cost them? I bet you wanted to give that gift back! And that's exactly how anyone would want to react to sex—or any gift, really—that is given reluctantly. How sad! Do you remember your honeymoon? If love was happy to give then, then it should be happy to give now. Otherwise, first love is lost.

God did not "have to" send His Son to die for us—He wanted to.[95]

You don't "have to" do anything. You don't "have to" get baptized. You don't "have to" not murder people to get into Heaven.

By the cross, you are free. Heaven costs you nothing. But use your freedom to love,[96] and to really love.[97] Love costs everything.

> "Remember this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver."[98]

> "Give to [your poor brother], and don't have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do. For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am com-

95 Isaiah 53:10

96 Galatians 5:13

97 Romans 12:9

98 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

manding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'"[99]

"**Burden**"

If you love someone, serving them is never a burden.

If you trust that someone loves you, then you know that you are not a burden to them.

"Pressure"/"Enough"

If you feel pressured to serve someone, that can only mean one of two things:

1. You can't or shouldn't do it, but you don't want them to be upset at you.

   It's wrong for someone to pressure you to do something that you shouldn't or be upset at you for doing something that you can't.

   Pretending to be disappointed in someone is not the same as expressing your desire for growth. Dangling carrots in front of someone's face is a worldly tactic, and a poor leadership style—not to mention manipulation.

   But it is possible to imagine these things. If you feel pressured by someone who is not pressuring you, then you are keeping track of the points yourself, which means that you are not loving.

2. You should do it, but you don't want to.

   If you feel pressured to do something that is good—but you don't want to be expected to make the sacrifices or effort (you would do something

99 Deuteronomy 15:10-11

for yourself)—then the problem is that you are not happy to give.

I have felt a lot of pressure when it comes to how I pray:

Am I doing enough?

The truth is that God wants **prayer** in the **same way** that I want sex as a man:

I want it every time that my wife has the opportunity,[100] and for her to be excited about it,[101] just as it was on our honeymoon.

And if an opportunity for full intimacy comes less than every day, then I want her to change her life to make daily opportunities.[102]

God also wants **prayer** the **same way** that she wants sex from me:

Just enjoy myself and do what is asked.[103] It's not possible for me to disappoint her if I make the time for it.

Lean on her harder if I am more in need.

There is nothing exciting about just "enough."

If your goal is to get "enough," then you have lost sight of the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is hidden treasure.

If your goal is to give "enough," then you are looking for the minimum that you can give to be free

100 1 Thessalonians 5:17

101 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18

102 Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35, 6:46; Luke 4:42

103 John 6:28-29; 1 John 3:21-22; Galatians 3:3

of your obligation.

"Ridiculous"

Is there anything too small or petty for you to give to God?

Is there any need of yours that is too small and petty for God to care about?

No! The very hairs on your head are numbered.[104] God is not going to scoff at you for praying for a red car if you do so with a pure heart.

Is there anything too big and costly for God to give us?

No! He didn't even spare His own Son.[105] And still, He is endlessly patient with us.

Shouldn't we love like God?[106]

Love that is reasonable is not love at all.

Love with planned limits is betrayal committed in the heart.[107] This is true even when it comes to how you react to someone's sin (as many say, "Oh, they better not do ___ **or** I will ___.").

If it matters to your wife to make the toilet paper roll face outwards, is that ridiculous?

Yes! But not if you love her.

You would be dying to do that for her if you were just now falling in love with her.

If she wants you to give up your hobbies, repaint the house 100 times, or dress more modestly all the time, is that ridiculous?

104 Matthew 10:30

105 Romans 8:32

106 John 13:34

107 Matthew 5:22; Matthew 13:21

Yes! But not if you love her.

Is your love too reasonable to be called "Christ-like?"

And didn't Jesus ask a man, who kept the whole Law his whole life, to go and sell everything that he owns?[108]

When that man walked away, was it judgmental for Jesus to say, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven"?

Isn't it ridiculous for Jesus to expect so much from a person?

Was that judgmental?

Not by God's definition, apparently:

> "I do not judge anyone. And if I did, My judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent Me is with Me."[109]

Still, we are called "judgmental" –

–Not even for asking people to sell everything that they own (and then saying that they are going to Hell if they say "No") –

–But we are called "judgmental" for pleading with those who claim to be Christians to stop their obvious sins.

Is it ridiculous for someone to suggest that you should be careful with the kinds of movies that you watch?

Is it ridiculous for someone to suggest that you should end a dating relationship that is not Christ-centered, even if you have built your life on it?

Does your life belong to God or not? If so, then nothing is ridiculous. Nothing is too big to give Him—if you truly choose

108 Matthew 19:16-22

109 John 8:15b-16

to love Him more than all precious things.[110]

If you can't give up your evil to God, then how could you give up what is good to Him?

"Have the right"

The Bible does not deny that we have rights.

But Jesus taught us that love is not sticking up for our own rights but yielding our rights to others.[111]

We cannot earn the right to anything,[112] it is freely given, even to those who are evil.[113]

The moment that we claim that we have earned the right to something, we also claim all else that we have earned the right to—Hell.

"But you did/said ___"

If my wife mistreats me or disrespects me, that does not give me the right to mistreat or disrespect her.

A not-so everyday example would be:

> Cheating on her is no worse of a crime whether she is the perfect wife, neglects me for sex, or even if she cheats on me.
>
> To say anything different would be keeping track of points, and for each circumstance I would deserve Hell anyway.

Love is proven when you love someone who is not loving you back. Otherwise, you prove that it wasn't love in the first place.

110 Luke 14:26-30

111 Matthew 5:38-42

112 Romans 3:23-24

113 Matthew 5:43-45

"But I have been doing ___"

On the other side of the coin, the good that you do can never count for the good that you don't do.

If my wife wants me to start kissing her goodbye everyday when I already say "I love you," it would not be loving for me to say:

"But I already say 'I love you.'"

That does not count for kissing her because what she wants is for me to kiss her—and by bringing up what I do, I have lost credit for even that.[114]

"I feel like you're doing a lot."

If you feel guilty for what other people do with you or uncomfortable with things being uneven, then Christianity might not be for you.

You will never out-give God. He will always bless you more than you bless Him.

Although, He feels the opposite way: He feels like He is getting the better end of the deal.[115] Which is why He is always happy to give: because of His great love.

And if you are a grateful and freely-giving person, then you will always feel like the people who love you are out-giving you.

If you can't happily and freely receive kindness from others without doing anything in return, that's a clear sign that you don't believe that your sin has been washed.

Love cannot be both a repayment (or a cushion that keeps you

114 Matthew 6:1-4

115 Deuteronomy 32:9; Isaiah 62:3-5

out of debt) and freely given. It can only be freely given, or it is not love at all.

"Fair"/ "The least that you/I can do"

You can have fairness, or you can have love. You cannot have both.

Fairness? Fairness for us is an eternity in Hell.

When I asked Kelsey to marry me, I made my expectations very clear:

"I am not asking you for something small."

I was not asking her to spend the rest of her life with me as long as it is easy. I wasn't asking her to just keep on living as if she was single—while I devote myself to being a good husband. I wasn't asking her to spare me some attention when she had some left over.

I was asking for the most that she could do—not the least that she could do.

If I were asking for the least, then I would be asking her to do something small in return for all the big things that I have done. A deal. A generous deal, it would seem to most, but an exchange nonetheless.

No. I was making a commitment:

I will be all-faithful to you, no matter how faithful you are to me.

I want you to be all-faithful to me, no matter how faithful I am to you.

This is the same covenant that I have entered in with the Church:

All of my life –

–The same covenant which they have entered with me:

All of their life.

All Christians are bound to this covenant because we are bound to Christ:[116]

All of His life for all of mine.

His faithful love never fails us, even when ours fails Him.

And our faithful love, if it is faithful love, never fails Him, even when His infinite generosity seems to fail us for a time.

These words help me to understand when I am walking in the flesh at all times –not just with my wife, but:

- With all people (as far as freely giving goes).
- With all believers (as far as freely receiving goes).[117]
- With God—In my private thoughts and times when I am alone.

I finally understand why things like "fits of anger" are fruits of the flesh.[118]

Blowing off steam when no one is looking doesn't seem like it can do any harm.

But our attitude in serving God matters to Him.

When we are suffering—whether it be for doing the right

116 1 John 4:20-21

117 3 John 1:7

118 Galatians 5:20

thing or for what seems like no reason at all—we love God by suffering happily (and honoring Him by trusting Him to set us free).[119]

For some of us, the only way that we can serve God is by our attitude in suffering—and you don't want to miss your one opportunity to gain Heavenly wealth—to do something that is in any way worthwhile to God!

The most extreme example of someone in this circumstance is a believer who cannot move or speak. But, we all experience seasons of life when we don't feel that we have the ability to make much of an impact.

For most of us, the majority of serving God is not in action or sacrifice—but in an attitude of faith. And it is from that the majority of Heavenly wealth is offered to us.

10.2 Not Me, but the Sinful Nature

I was extremely blessed to have sat in a class on the book of Romans while Kelsey and I were dating.

This was my only time sitting in this class. I was asked to assist with the screens, and I was only halfway listening because I was focused on texting my boo.

The teacher said one thing that caught my attention, and it completely changed my relationship with Kelsey, with myself, and with every other Christian in my life.

He read this verse:

> "But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it."[120]

119 Job 40:8

120 Romans 7:20

Then, the teacher said, "You see, what Paul is saying here is that when you sin, you're literally not the one doing it. It's the sin living in you."

Ha! He literally just repeated the verse in his own words.

That's all it took for me, though. I guess I needed to hear someone agree with what the Bible says because the idea was so foreign to me (How often is that true for all of us!).

I've read Romans 7-8 more times than I can count –more than I have read any other part of the Bible. Every time that I got to that verse, I just got uncomfortable and didn't think about it:

> *Of course, that can't be true. I have to take responsibility for my sins!*

If every time that I sinned, I just said "Welp, that wasn't me, that was my sinful nature," I would never be disturbed by or repent for my sins. I would just do whatever I felt like and expect a heavenly reward for it when I die.

Paul sounds like he is not taking responsibility for his own actions.

But the Bible says what it says, and I knew that I had to believe it—even if it made me feel uncomfortable.

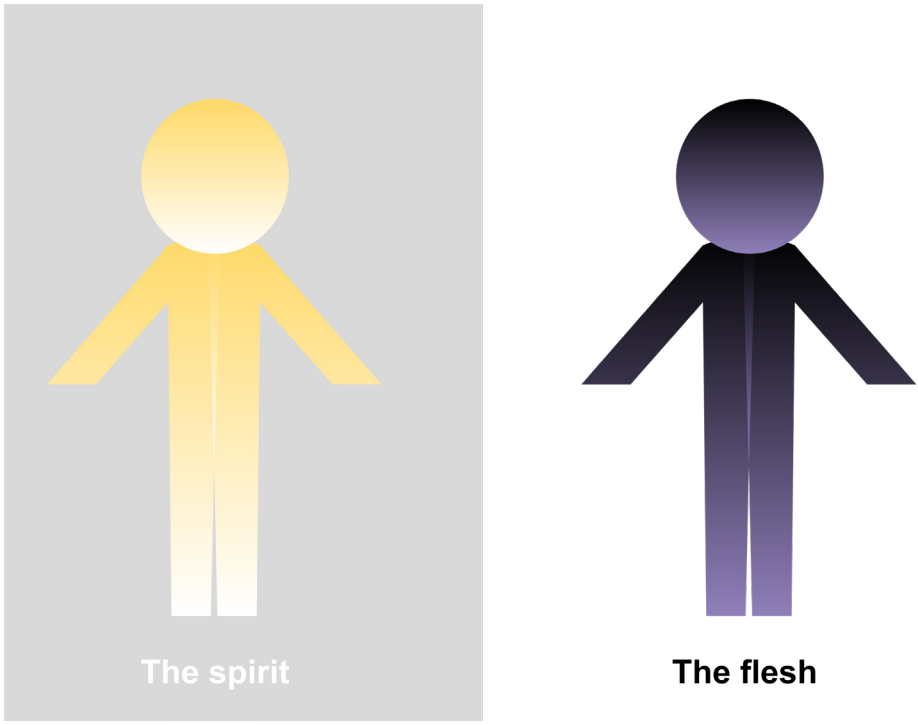
I chose to believe, and in a moment, God used this teacher's one sentence to open my mind to a whole world of truth in the Bible.

I was blind to it before in all my reading. It was like I could only see every two or three words on every page, but it suddenly entered my mind all at once!

Forgetness

If when I sin, it is not me, but my sinful nature, then who am I?

> "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. Behold: the old has passed away, and the new has come!"[121]



I am not referring to the literal parts of my soul: my physical body and eternal spirit. My spirit has craved what is evil,[122] and my body sometimes craves what is good.

> But "the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God, and it never will."[123]

Both of these people exist inside of me.

121 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:5-6; Isaiah 6:7

122 Jeremiah 17:9

123 Romans 8:7 (NLT)

One is the real me.[124]

One is the other me.[125]

One is the new me that God is creating.[126]

One is the old me.[127]

One is God's nature (perfect & inherently good).[128]

One is the sinful nature (inherently evil).[129]

One has never sinned.[130] It cannot sin.[131] I am being this person when I am walking in the spirit[132] (when I am acting in faith and love).

One always sins.[133] It can only sin.[134] I am being this person when I am walking in the flesh[135] (when I am acting in doubt and pride, a system of points).

One is a worthy heir of Heaven.[136]

One deserves punishment but died

124 Romans 7:20; John 17:16

125 Romans 7:18

126 Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10

127 2 Corinthians 5:17

128 2 Peter 1:3-4; Galatians 2:20

129 Psalm 51:5

130 Romans 4:20; Galatians 4:23

131 1 John 3:9

132 Ephesians 4:22-24

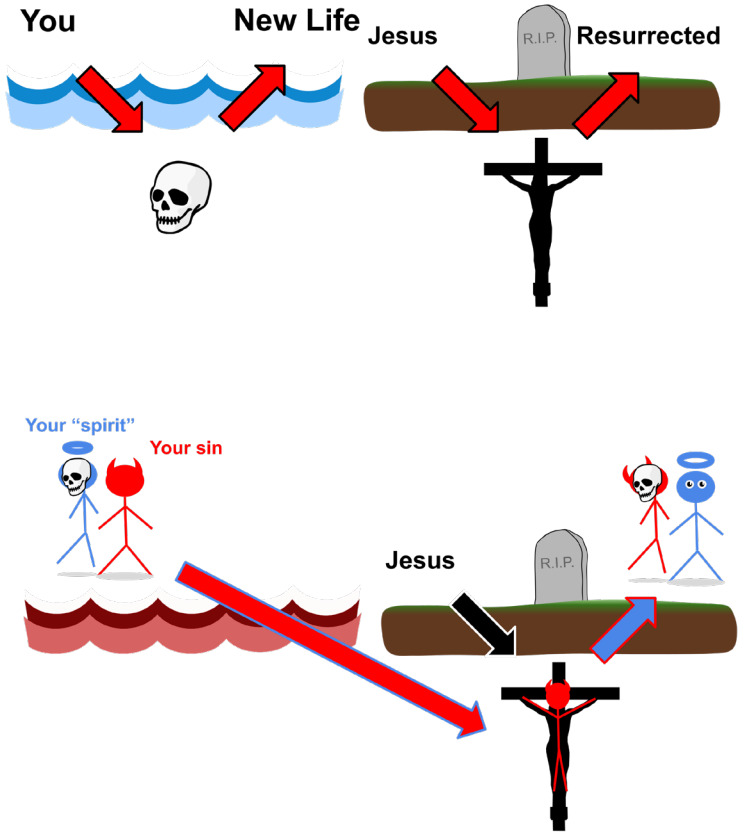
133 Romans 8:7

134 Romans 7:18

135 Galatians 5:16-17

136 Romans 8:16-17; Colossians 1:12; Revelation 3:4

on the cross with Jesus.[137] It stays dead if I kill it again by resisting temptation or repenting.[138] [139]



When it comes to forgiving other Christians, this is all very

137 Colossians 2:13-14

138 Galatians 5:24; John 15:1-2; 1 John 2:1

139 2 Corinthians 5:21

important.

Jesus gave us special instructions for a Christian brother who does repent:

> "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."[140]

We know that a person does not have to repent in order for us to forgive them. While being crucified, Jesus cried out for His offenders (as He instructed us to do)[141] :

> "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."[142]

Forgiveness, by itself, means to wipe away debt.[143] But in order to forgive, you have to do more than just forget someone's debt. This is because forgiveness and love are inseparable.

For believers, forgiving them means more than just wiping away their debt. Like forgiving unrepentant nonbelievers, it means that we must also give to our offenders in affection[144] and deed.[145]

But what is unique to forgiving repentant believers is that:

> After they repent, we must choose to **trust** them, recognizing their New Man.
>
> **It's this trust that enabled the early church to boldly ask of each**

140 Luke 17:3-4

141 Matthew 5:44

142 Luke 23:34

143 Matthew 18:26

144 Romans 12:9; Mark 1:41

145 Matthew 5:43-47

other when they were in need,[146] to be vulnerable about their struggles,[147] and to give generously in a way that sometimes put their lives,[148] possessions,[149] and families[150] at risk.

It's this trust that enabled Jesus,[151] John,[152] and many other Christians to speak well of each other.

It's this trust that grieved Paul[153] and which grieves the Holy Spirit[154] when believers sin. It's this trust that causes us to seek reconciliation with our brothers[155] and to call them to repentance.[156]

It's this trust that enables Christians to spur each other with love, rather than with guilt or force.[157]

It's this trust that enables us to mourn differently than the world when our loved ones pass.[158]

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146 Acts 4:34

147 James 5:16

148 Acts 9:26-29; Philippians 2:25-30

149 Acts 2:45

150 Matthew 25:35c, 40

151 John 1:46

152 3 John 1:12

153 2 Corinthians 12:21

154 Ephesians 4:30

155 Matthew 18:15

156 Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 10:24

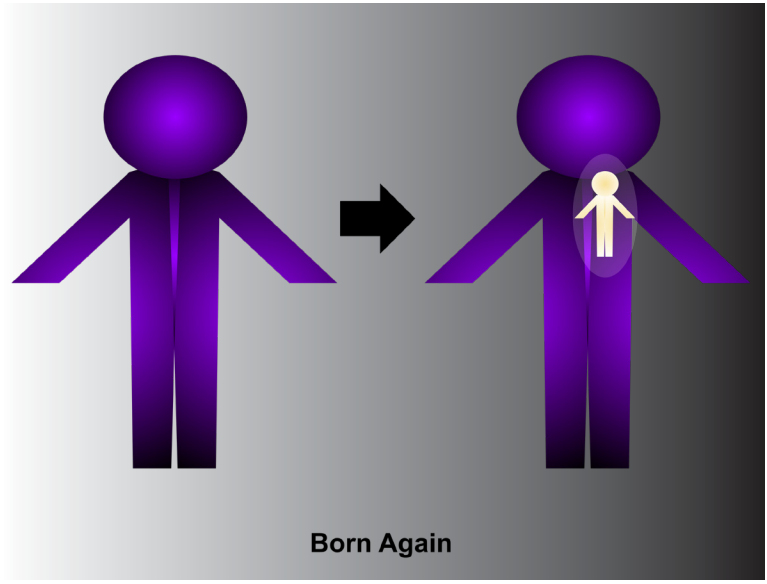
157 Philemon 1:8

158 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Not only must we forgive other believers in this way, but we have to forgive ourselves, forgetting our own sins and taking joy in counting ourselves as worthy to receive from God all that we desire[159] (This is, of course, only a result of His work, not ours[160]).

If we do not accept our New Man, then we are unable to love. Every "good" thing that we can only be for points –trying to earn a blank slate or comforting ourselves with evidence of "goodness" in us.

In the same way, we must accept that other believers forgive us in this way, otherwise we will be prevented from loving them, trying to earn their love back instead of loving them freely.



Being born again is the bare minimum requirement to get into Heaven. It will not get you treasure in Heaven.[161] But anyone who is born again would want to bear fruit, since the New Man has an inherently good nature.

159 Hebrews 4:16; Romans 8:32

160 Epheisans 2:6-8

161 1 Corinthians 3:15

Being born again is your first decision of repentance and faith[162] –and God's response of transforming you, which is certain.[163]

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Whether you noticed or not, the Holy Spirit is the one who opened your eyes to Christ in the first place,[164] and He gave you the desire and strength to make that first jump.

He is also an infinite source for your growth,[165] which means that He is also the assurance that other Christians have the potential to love you in ways that they are not loving you yet.

The more that we walk in the spirit, the more that our love grows more perfect.[166]

On the day of judgment, you will be judged –not for all the good and bad that you have done –but for either all of the bad or all of the good.[167] Which judgment that you will get depends on whether or not you continue to walk in the spirit.

162 Acts 2:38

163 Romans 10:13

164 John 6:44

165 John 4:13-14; 2 Corinthians 3:18

166 1 John 4:17

167 Luke 12:47-48; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Ezekiel 18:22, 24

You can trust that, if you have ever truly walked in the spirit,[168] that you will be found faithful when you are called Home because God will be sure of it.[169] Still, we walk in holy fear of God because we know the consequences of our sin.[170]

Only what you have done in both love and faith will make it with you to Heaven. The rest will be burned up.[171]

Finally Free from my Sin

Understanding my newness in Christ is how I finally got free from masturbation after 15 years of doing all that I could to stop –

> –Yet masturbating more than even the worst ones out there.

Being engaged to Kelsey, she had the right to know when I masturbated if I did. She was committing her whole life to me, and I needed to be honest with her about what she was getting.

The first time that I told her, she forgave me easily.

I repented and believed in what the Bible said about my newness and complete freedom from sin.

"I am a new person," I told myself. This new "me" that God has created has never sinned and cannot sin.

Kelsey believed it, too.

Then I did it again.

I don't remember why or anything about it.

168 1 John 2:19

169 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

170 Matthew 5:29-30

171 Galatians 5:6b; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Kelsey was a lot more hurt this time: She was especially hurt that I did it after saying that I wouldn't.

And she should have been hurt! She was right to be disappointed. She was trusting me and God in me to love her. I didn't!

> She was hurt because of her faith. The fact that she was hurt was proof that she was trusting God! **She was not wrong to trust me, but the fact that she was hurt when I betrayed her trust proved that she did the right thing.**

The temptation here is to stop trusting altogether. She could have stopped trusting me. And I could have stopped believing that God made me new and freed me from sin.

But I repented. I believed God.

She believed God. And she believed me.

The slate was clean.

> "I am a new person." *I am not that same person who has masturbated for 15 years. By the power of God, I do not sin.*[172]

That was the last time that I masturbated, ever. It was roughly 5 months before we got married.

The Resurrection was the final nail in the coffin for my sin.

> I had to choose to put God and others before me—yes.
>
> And I had to joyfully expect for God to meet and

172 1 John 3:9

exceed all of my desires—yes.

But those things are not enough to stop me from sinning when I am faced with the fact that I have just sinned and I have been doing the same sin for my whole life.

It means nothing that God has a reward for me or that He requires anything from me if I am powerless to obey Him. Satan had convinced me, "You've done it before, so you'll do it again" (when in fact, neither is true!).

Being made clean when I got saved means nothing if I become unclean the moment that I sin after that. Because everyone who gets saved and lives on afterwards does sin.

God's forgiveness is all it takes to get into Heaven, but if I can't love God back, then that makes my life on Earth meaningless. Hopeless.

I had to believe that the Me-Who-Sinned died on the cross with Jesus. **I had to put him on the cross with the rest of the old me.**

The new me rose to life with Him in His Resurrection on the day that I gave my life to Jesus, and he is still the real me, alive in me right now.

I choose to be him and believe that I am him:

> I am a new person. I do not sin.[173]

Like I believed when I got free from my sin the first time, six months after getting saved:

> I "have no obligation to do what the sinful nature urges me to do."[174]

173 1 John 3:9

174 Romans 8:12

I believe that, even *if* (not "when") I do sin.[175]

This has worked for all sin in my life that I know of, yet I still have to repent often, as God keeps revealing to me different sins that I was less aware of. I know that there is a lifetime's worth ahead of me because I will never know how deep my sin goes.

Also, yes, like my Rabbi, I am able to learn obedience from the things I suffer, without sinning.[176] This is because He fulfills all of His promises to us:

> "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."[177]

Accountability/Discipled by Christ

That being said, I do have a sinful nature. And I have to live with that in mind, too.

You may have noticed that a big part of the last moment which led to my freedom was Kelsey's reaction to my sin.

More than using anything else in my life, God has caused me to repent from my sins because I have seen the ways that my sins have hurt my wife.

Throughout our time together, much of the way that I thought, spoke, and acted was sin. I did these things my whole life before knowing her, but I was unaware that these things were wrong.

Until each time that I saw the tears in her eyes.

And I don't know how I would have figured out that it was sin

175 1 John 2:1

176 Hebrews 5:8

177 Luke 6:40

otherwise. My relationship with her has forced me to grow, **more than all of my private works combined** (just like every relationship in my life could).

I learned something:

> I know that I am blind to my sin, so I use her to my advantage. I do this by putting myself at a disadvantage:
>
> > I am accountable.

This means that:

- I take responsibility for my wrongs even if she does not take responsibility for hers.
- I do not make excuses for my sins or make them seem small. I don't let her excuse my sins or make them seem small.
- I hold myself accountable. It is my job to reach out if I do wrong.

> **I don't make her earn my trust for me to confess my sin**. If she is hurt or angry, thinks lowly of me, or punishes me, then I still did the right thing by confessing.

I care more about being free, and about the truth, than how she may react.

I want to be loved for who I truly am, not who I pretend to be. Otherwise, I am not truly loved.

- I make commitments (not promises) to her, so that I know that I will do what I tell her that I will do when she is not around.

> And if I have to stray from what we agreed on for godly reasons, then I tell her.

- I am forthcoming about my actions, thoughts, and feelings, especially if there is a chance that she may disagree or be upset.

> This way, we can get on the same page with our battle plan before the battle starts, and not in the middle of the battle.

- I am **never above** being questioned, or it is my pride.

- I make sure never to put myself in tempting situations[178] or situations where it can seem that I am up to no good.[179] If I have to go into places like that, then I am sure that I tell my wife every detail, before and after, if I can.

Being a disciple means to follow around your Rabbi. A Rabbi does not follow around his disciple.

Jesus is my Rabbi, and my wife is His body –or at least, His finger.

I am going to chase down the Jesus in her so that I can be more like Him.

Even if she is stuck in her sin, that does not mean that I cannot find clues in her grief to get myself free from my sin, but:

> More often, I should expect that God will give her **exactly what I need to hear through her obedience** to Him:
>
> "He personally gave some to be

178 2 Samuel 11:1-2

179 Romans 14:13-16

> apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ**, until we all reach unity[180] in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. **But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way** into Him who is the head—Christ. **From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part."**[181]

I know that God likes to speak through people, especially His Body and those of humble circumstances.[182]

> I will not be like Eliab, who belittled the child David[183] –and was proven wrong, when David slayed Goliath. Surely, Eliab could have taken Goliath's head if he believed the words of his little brother.
>
> I will be like Nineveh, who fasted and sat in ashes

180 Chapter 13 of this book

181 Ephesians 4:11-16

182 Job 32:6-9; Judges 16:15-16; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Kings 22:1; John 7:52; Mark 16:1-11; among many others

183 1 Samuel 17:26b-28

> after hearing five words from a hateful man that they did not know –and were shown God's love.[184]

Yes, God does also speak to me privately, without anyone 's help, and this is the proof that He is discipling me, and not humans.

But, He expects us to **follow** –to disciple ourselves through His people. A disciple walks in the dust of his rabbi's feet, so we shadow the feet of Jesus' Body.

If I do not find Jesus' wisdom in my believing wife, then I have a hard heart.

> And I can either soften it now by working long and hard to hear her, or God will have to break it for me in time.
>
> I would rather it be sooner than later –I am desperate to be one with who He has given me as soon as possible!

I am accountable to no one but God for judgment, but I am accountable to everyone in love and humility, to prepare myself for judgment.[185]

10.3 The Burned House

It was easy to forgive Kelsey in the moment, when I first learned about her past sexual sins.

As we were approaching marriage, though, the pain began to sink in. Every day, I discovered a new way that it hurt me.

I felt an incredible loss and fear.

184 Jonah

185 Proverbs 4:7

I may be better than any man she has ever experienced in every way, but she will always have the power to compare me to another man. I had no one to compare her to, and I was giving her my whole life –'til death do us part. I felt so vulnerable.

I wanted to be her one and only. I wanted every part of her life and all of her memories.

I thought that what I needed to do to make the pain stop was to make Kelsey understand the pain that she caused me. I brought up my constant pain to Kelsey, every day. I kept telling her how badly she hurt me.

She was terribly hurt by all that I said, and I was very confused.

"Forgiving means forgetting," she would tell me from behind her tears.

"I know," I would say, "but maybe if I just get it out, the pain will go away."

It didn't go away. It only got worse.

Kelsey's world was upside down:

> Many months earlier, I told her before to stop praying to be made clean because God already had. This was a huge part of what our relationship was built on, and it meant the world to her.
>
> But although she was innocent before God, she was not innocent before me.
>
> I felt that I had something to offer her because of my virginity –but she had nothing to offer me.

I was accepting her as my future wife despite her flaws. In other words, she was "enough."

The pain was overwhelming. I was overcome with thoughts of what she had done and awful images in my mind of her with another man.

Still, I thought that the solution was to get it off my chest. Maybe if I just wrote down every gut-wrenching thought and feeling that "she put me through" and let her know exactly how bad it was, it would go away. After all, she is supposed to carry my burdens with me.

So, I got her to agree to let me do that.

We drove to an empty parking lot, and for an hour, I unloaded: I let her know just how bad she hurt me. I told her every way that she hurt me. I told her about horrible images that have been haunting me and described to her exactly what I was seeing.

No matter how much I said, I didn't feel any better. The truth is that I would never be able to express how awful what she did to me was because it was immeasurably bad.

She was devastated. She tried to give up on our relationship right there. She didn't feel like she had anything to offer me at all.

Also, she had not had any thoughts of it before, but now the shameful memories were popping into her head.

I tried to justify what I did by explaining it with a metaphor:

"If you burned my house down, and you were my

> neighbor –I am not going to sue you for a new house, but the least that you can do is sweep up some of the ashes on your way inside."
>
> "That's *points*," She muffled through her tears. "You said 'the least you can do.'"

I prayed several times throughout the conversation for Him to help us, as we always do when we come to a point in conflict where we cannot see the way forward.

> "You're right," I said, "It is points. I'm sorry."

I don't know what I would have done after that, but thankfully, God decided to reveal the truth of the situation to me at that moment:

> My house isn't in ashes anymore. Jesus rebuilt my house, twice as big as before.

Yes, it is true that what she did to me was awful beyond my ability to describe. It was a debt that she could not hope to ever repay. There is a reason that God is so adamant about sexual sin.

Yes, it is true that forgiveness means that I pay for the damage that my offenders did to me. If there was suffering to bear, it was loving for me to bear it, not to put it back onto Kelsey's shoulders.

But I did not have to bear it.

Jesus bore her sin on the cross. Her sin died with Him. Nothing more had to be paid, and no one had to suffer for it anymore.[186]

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186 This can be seen through how God treats all of us. None of us have received the full consequences of our sins, and God has protected others from damage from our sins too. Not every drunk driver kills someone and receives shame, yet each one

They say, "God forgives, but actions have consequences." But the consequences for our sin are loss and death.

Jesus covered the *death* part by dying on the cross.

He covered the *loss* part by rising from the dead.

Kelsey rose to be a new, sinless person when she believed in the power of God to do so. The new woman that God created has only ever loved me, only belongs to me, and no part of her has ever been with another man.

Everything that was taken away from me was given back to me on the day that she repented.

More than that, I received Kelsey even better than if she was a virgin by her own works.

For all our work, we can never be made as pure as Jesus, but by God's power through the work of Jesus we are made perfectly pure.

Kelsey was a virgin, and so was I, even though I did not deserve to be called one.

Even more than a perfect virgin, God transformed Kelsey to be like Himself. She is not only perfectly sinless, but perfectly loving. Like God, she is a river of unrelenting love. She seizes every opportunity to love that there is! And she radiates joy and affection while doing it. I'm so blessed to be the one to receive her love!

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is just as guilty. Enoch and Elijah sinned, but they never experienced death. This is because God was looking forward to the Cross for them, just as He does for us. For the same reason, he also protects those destined for Hell, giving them an opportunity that they will never take. This is why Consequentialism is Demonic, ignoring the ability of an all-powerful God to restore all things fully, and more than fully. When Peter cut off a man's ear, Jesus healed it. Jesus can and does heal trauma and every other kind of loss (time, financial, purity etc.) the same way.

I believed what God showed me. I shared it with Kelsey, she believed, and we were restored.

There is nothing in my whole life that I regret more than making my wife bear the burden of her sin on that day.

She was no longer just pure to God; She was pure to me.

I told her, "We are going to have our first time together on our wedding night."

She was delighted at the idea. Wow –I love her so much!

> After she repented, all of my suffering was no longer her fault. It was my fault for not trusting God.
>
> After I forgave her, I continued to suffer, and have continued to suffer until today –as I write this. It's no longer my fault, though.
>
> The horrible thoughts and feelings have come to overwhelm me again and again. They can feel so much more real than God's reality, which I choose to believe, but I do believe what God says:
>
> > That she is and always has been faithful, that nothing is lost, and that I have everything that I crave and more –
> >
> > –I hold onto this until I feel it.

It is only Satan's fault that I have continued to suffer. He is a liar, and the father of all lies. Restoration is mine now, but he lies to me to try to make me believe that it is not.

I believe that God will set me free from these awful temptations, but for now, they are a thorn in my side.[187]

187 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

I do not believe that most Christians who practice radical forgiveness (true forgiveness of someone who has done something unspeakably awful to them), as I have, will have to endure this suffering.

You can trust that God will supernaturally heal you of your wound.

But if He doesn't, you must suffer in love for your offender, as I have. In Heaven, God will heal our hearts of all pain, and there is no doubt that we will be free to enjoy close friendship with our offenders with no memory of the offense.[188] For now, we do exactly that, but in faith.

Without telling Kelsey, I prayed that God would heal her hymen. I wholeheartedly believed that she was a virgin even with a broken hymen, and I was happy either way. But I wanted to have that experience with her, and I trusted God with it.

Virgins Again

There are plenty of virgin women in the world who have a torn hymen. This can happen from activities besides having sex like gymnastics, horseback riding, biking, use of feminine hygiene products, or injury.

But no woman who has had sex has a hymen that isn't torn.

My wife does not remember how or when she broke her hymen the first time, but I surely broke it on our wedding night.

Although I have prayed for many, I have never in my life seen a miracle. This is the first and only undeniably supernatural thing that has ever been a part of my life.

God heard my prayer, again.

188 Isaiah 65:17

Yes, I believe that He did it just because He loves me! There are no words to describe how I feel that the God of Heaven would look down on me and hear my silly wants.

He does not love me more than He loves you.

Kelsey was a virgin before God gave her a new hymen, and she would have been a virgin even if He hadn't, but God gave this miracle as a sign:

God really makes people new.

Kelsey and I were comforted to be given a sign that all that we had learned and were holding onto up to this point is actually true.

Because of the death of and Resurrection of Jesus, not my sin nor hers can take away one blessing that He is not willing to pay back—plus everything else that we could want, as evidence that we have truly been forgiven and adopted as children:

> "'Comfort, comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and announce to her that her time of forced labor is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from the Lord's hand **double for all her sins.**"[189]

> "Joseph was 30 years old **when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt**. Joseph left Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout the land of Egypt…
>
> "Two sons were born to Joseph before the years of famine arrived. Asenath daughter of Potiphera,

189 Isaiah 40:1-2

priest at On, bore them to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, meaning, **'God has made me forget all my hardship in my father's house.'** And the second son he named Ephraim, meaning, **'God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction….'**

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please, come near me,' and they came near. 'I am Joseph, your brother,' he said, 'the one you sold into Egypt. And now **don't be worried or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me** ahead of you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. **God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.**

"'Return quickly to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me without delay. You can settle in the land of Goshen and be near me—you, your children, and grandchildren, your sheep, cattle, and all you have. There I will sustain you, for there will be five more years of famine. Otherwise, you, your household, and everything you have will become destitute.' Look! Your eyes and my brother Benjamin's eyes can see that it is I, Joseph, who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all my glory in Egypt and about all you have seen. And bring my father here quickly.'

"Then Joseph threw his arms around Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept on his shoulder. **Jo-**

seph kissed each of his brothers as he wept, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

"When the news reached Pharaoh's palace, 'Joseph's brothers have come,' Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and go on back to the land of Canaan. Get your father and your families and come back to me. **I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you can eat from the richness of the land.' You are also commanded, 'Do this: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your young children and your wives and bring your father here. Do not be concerned about your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"**[190]

190 Genesis 41:46, 50-52, 45:4-20

11. Feeding Trauma

Now, you may be wondering, why did Kelsey and I do all of the awful things that we did in the first place?

It was not because of trauma:

> "Each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires."[191]

Let us tell you exactly how that was true for us.

Christian Counseling was helpful to Kelsey and me. We were each in counseling before meeting each other.

One thing that made counseling helpful was that it made us reflect on our past. We came to accept that things that were done to us were wrong.

> This is important because forgiving someone and making excuses for someone are not the same thing. You have to accept that someone has done something undeniably wrong to you in order to

191 James 1:14

truly forgive them.

Another thing that made it helpful is that it helped us to understand that what we felt, thought, believed, and did was not really logical.

> It was all an attempt to prevent the pain of our pasts from repeating, when in fact we were the ones making our pasts repeat.
>
> By faith, we can trust God to give us a better future than our painful pasts.[192]

The trap of reflecting on your trauma is this, though:

> Most people never get to the forgiving part.
>
> Most people never get to the faith part.
>
> And these are both things that can and must be done immediately.[193]
>
> It's been said that "Time heals all wounds."
>
> But even the World will tell you that that is not true.
>
> A healing process does not take time because time does not heal at all –it only makes Goliath seem much smaller once you're at a distance from him. No faith is required, and no giants are killed.

Understanding our trauma did not set us free from it.

Instead, it gave us reasons to justify our sin and reasons to believe that we were stuck in our sins.

You can only stop being the villain after realizing that you are

192 Psalm 126:5-6

193 Matthew 6:15

the villain.

Victims and heroes cannot be villains. I can't accept responsibility for my actions if I believe even a little bit that I am a victim or a hero.

The truth is this:

> Our past did not shape us. Our sinful nature shaped us.
>
> Trauma did not make us evil; it just revealed what was already on the inside of us (as Jesus' testing revealed what was on the inside of Him).
>
> Of all the things that happened to us, good and bad, we chose to let the bad things shape us by putting our faith in them.
>
> We know this to be true because there are many who have faced the same trauma which we have—yet learned very different "lessons" from those events, or were not affected at all. Instead, they were shaped by other evil events in their own lives.

My trauma led me to some core beliefs that were not true. Two of those beliefs really shaped my life in a bad way:

1. "I will never be loved by a woman."

2. "God doesn't love me."

Now, I would have never thought that I believed these things, especially the second one. "Of course I believe that God loves me," I thought.

But my definition of love was not God's definition. I thought that He cared more about whether I was submitting to Him than He cared about blessing me. Submission to God with

joy is the greatest blessing, but God delights in giving to us more than He delights in receiving our honor.

If He said it, then He believes it for Himself too:

> **"It's more blessed to give than to receive."**[194]

It was because I didn't believe in God's love that I didn't confidently believe that He would answer my prayer for a wife, even though I saw Him answer prayers like this for others. I justified my doubt with theology:

> "Maybe that's not God's plan for me. I don't love God for what's in His pockets."

But you can't love without also loving with your pockets;[195]

So naturally, I didn't expect anyone to love me, by that definition.

In other words, I didn't expect anyone to love me in a way that took sacrifice or effort.

And I didn't expect anyone to give me what I "wanted," but just what I "needed" (and then, only if I paid them back).

This was especially true for women.

Women, I believed, were incapable of loving men. In fact, I didn't even believe that women could love men by the world's standard of love.

I found evidence for these beliefs in my own trauma, but I fed these lies in many ways, and that's what caused the real harm.

I fed the lies by:

194 Acts 20:35

195 Matthew 6:21; Luke 15:31; Acts 4:34; John 3:16

1. The music that I listened to and the things that I watched.

What I consumed was "less bad" than what most people did. However, even PG movies and songs without sexual content can paint a very bad picture of what a woman and what a relationship is supposed to be like. For me to feed on, there were plenty of horror stories of cold women and models of men who dealt with it by being cold themselves (Cold can mean many things: not just being vengeful, but also losing hope).

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

2. Getting drunk on screens.

When I had negative feelings, I would drown myself in my phone or TV.

Talking about it with God would have really helped.

Talking to other Christians would have really helped too. I should have worked hard to understand the encouragements and warnings of Christians who had different "opinions" than mine, instead of just dismissing and avoiding them.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

3. The way that I talked with other men about women.

Everyone has had bitterness towards the opposite sex, and now I can see that it's all because of rejection.

We can all be tempted to jump on board because this rejection exists for men and women, from suitors, exes, or even the spurns of those that we are currently in a relationship with.

I was bitter because of the women that rejected me, and I shared that bitterness with other men, who felt rejected because of their singleness or because of how their wife treats them.

I would complain to other men about the behavior and double-standards that women have so that I could get those men's "Amen." Often I just silently "Amenned" as other men complained and defamed womankind.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

4. Chasing women for validation.

I had a chip on my shoulder for being rejected. I was aware of this at the time, too.

I sought to prove to myself and others that I was worth something by the kind of girl that I tried to have.

I thought, "Getting this one will make everyone forget about the last girl that rejected me, and I can forget about it too."

> Although, I knew that the second part was definitely not true.
>
> I knew that getting a coveted girl would not ever make up for the rejection before her. But I sought the next girl anyway because I had no hope or knowledge of how to make myself feel like I was worth something.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

5. Obsessing over girls that I was not currently in a relationship with, without the shared understanding that we would get married, "crushing" on women.

It's not wrong to think that someone is attractive or to think that they have marriage-qualities.

But I would imagine what it was like to be with girls and wonder if they were the one that God had for me, letting myself get attached without having even asked them out (Men: Ask her

out, or forget about her!).

> If I would have trusted that God would show me in the right time, asked them out as soon as there was an opportunity, vetted them over a few dates to see if they met my God-given standards, and did not give my heart over unless they agreed to pursue marriage, then I would have saved my heart as an unshared gift for my wife.

I was torturing myself. Without an agreement to get married from these girls, I continually gave my heart to them, leaving myself open to heartbreak over, and over again.

And I would add each broken relationship to my identity, which for some sick reason I thought that I would share with my future wife.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

6. Feeding my insecurities.

I became the man that I thought that women wanted.

I was aloof. I flirted from a distance.

I cheered myself up with all of the ways that women made fools of themselves over me as I looked down on them in cold disgust.

> Like a coward, I used what God had given me to take advantage of others, instead of preserving it as a gift for my wife.

I worked out and used my body to make women want me. I used my body to make other men feel inadequate, and I

compared myself to other men to make me feel better about myself.

> Showing my body to others used to give me a lot of satisfaction, but now I have to kill those feelings of pride from the past, and I no longer show my body as I did before. Now, I see that I did evil things to my brothers and sisters of which I am very ashamed.
>
> I gave away the private gift of my body, which belonged to my wife alone, to anyone who could make me feel desirable.

When I did come across men that I felt were more handsome, rich, or confident than me, I burned with envy. I meditated on how I could have what they had, stewed on how unfair it was that I couldn't, and sacrificed my integrity to get those things.

And I did the same things when I came across women who did not seem to be attracted to me.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

7. Logic, "realism," and pessimism.

Bad things happen. Not all the time, but you could argue most of the time.

If bad things did happen, it makes sense to assume that more bad things will happen.

I was single for 23 years, and chances were that if it had been that long that it would stay that way.

Chances were that if I did actually get married that she would treat me the same way that most women treat their husbands.

Things were not looking up for me, logically speaking.

If anyone were to try to encourage me about a brighter future, I would basically say, "Thanks, but you don't know that. God answers some people's prayers the way that they pray and other people get trials instead."

> And that's true! But that's not exciting and encouraging, so it's not the whole truth for a believer.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

8. Ignoring the good in women.

It's not that I have never seen a woman show integrity or show love for a man.

I was drawn to music where, in vulnerability, women sang about their love for a man. I adored loyal, nurturing wives and starry-eyed damsels in movies.

I refused to believe that women like this existed, though, because it didn't fit my narrative.

It delighted me to hear stories of women who did kind things for their husbands at my church, but I didn't believe in this for myself. I also kept a record of coldness and hints of coldness that these women showed towards their husbands.

When a woman would mistreat a man, on TV or in stories from other men, I would add it to my collection of evidence that women were all cold and that things were unfair for men. I never experienced the trauma myself, but I might as well have because I made it part of the story of my world.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

9. Mixed motives

It's possible to do something for the right reasons and the

wrong reasons at the same time.[196]

This makes it very easy to hide the darkness in your heart from yourself.

For example, on one hand, I was asking women out because I was trying to obey God.[197]

On the other hand, however, I was doing it to prove that I was worth something.

I needed to deal with my insecurity by **submitting to God's way of thinking** in my heart, even if that still led to me making the same decisions.

> Good and bad motives cannot work together. Your heart will always cling to the bad motive,[198] and God will count it as evil.[199]

In my pursuit of these girls, my heart clung to proving that I was worth something.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

10. Unforgiveness

I once heard a man who did counseling at my church say:

> "Counseling is always the same. You always have to start with telling people to forgive their parents."

At the time, this sounded very weird to me. I was learning in counseling to accept that things done to me as a child were wrong.

196 Romans 10:2

197 Proverbs 18:22; 1 Corinthians 7:9

198 Matthew 6:24-26

199 Matthew 5:21-22

With all that was done to me, it made sense that I masturbated as much as I did, for example.

In fact, in light of all that has been done to me, I turned out pretty good.

I could use anyone else's big sin to justify my small sin—whether they caused me to sin or I caused them (which makes no sense! If I cussed at somebody, and they decided to shoot me, then it was still wrong for me to cuss at them. And even if someone else tempted me to sin, I am still responsible for my sin. If I decided to withhold forgiveness from the murderer or the temper, then I am never humbled to complete repentance for my own sin —all I have are excuses)

Why feel guilty about the bad things that I have done when I can spend my time thinking about how much worse other people have treated me?

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

A Woman of God

Trauma taught me two things that shaped my life and sense of self before I submitted to God:

1. "Love has to be earned, so it can also be taken away."

2. "I'm not trustworthy to be loved."

Because I viewed myself and my life through the lens of these two beliefs, I never felt safe.

I believed I could be punished for wanting love and punished if I somehow failed to "deserve" it once it was "earned".

Whether or not I was loved rested entirely on my shoulders. I couldn't trust anyone, not even myself.

As a result, I constantly sought control and self-validation to be "safe from punishment" or "worthy of love." I did this through many ways:

1. Dieting

From a young age, I became insecure about my appearance and connected my body image to whether or not I deserved love. The way I dieted changed throughout my life: portion control, low carb, excessive exercise, elimination diets, and disordered calorie counting.

Sometimes what I was doing seemed "healthy" to people. Sometimes people told me I was "too skinny". Either way people noticed my efforts only fueled my obsession. Anytime and any way I was able to make myself skinnier, it gave me a sense of control over my life. I held onto this means of control until I came to know Jesus.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

2. Social Media

Social media allowed me to compare and perform. Just like comparing my body to others, with social media I could compare any part of my life to any part of anyone else's: job, school, home, family, clothes, car, free time…you name it. The social media feed gave me an idol to look to and say, "This is what will make me safe! This will make me worthy of love!"

I would spend hours upon hours a day lost on social media letting comparison breed discontentment and fuel my need to perform up to par. If I went a day with nothing to post, I would have extreme anxiety. I would dwell on when and

how I could have something interesting to post—from outfits, trips, holidays, and more. I needed to show the world that I was good and worthy of love.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

3. Feminism & vegetarianism

Even though I didn't realize it, I was using social media to look for identities that would make me "safe from punishment" or "trustworthy". The algorithm brought me to feminism and vegetarianism.

I fell into a rabbit hole of feminist ideology one night scrolling through social media. I was hooked. Not only does feminism teach that your sexuality belongs to you and is without consequence, but it teaches that men are unnecessary! Women don't need them and can actually BE everything that a man is supposed to be. This helped me feel free from needing or expecting anything from men, especially love. I couldn't be punished for something if I didn't need it. As a woman, I could be self-sufficient.

This worked in conjunction to help me feel free from needing God. I could keep running and be my own god. That is the rhetoric of feminism and I was in deep. I filled my life with feminist ideas, social media pages, entertainment, and music.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

Another identity I found was vegetarianism/veganism. With ideas of "body-shaming" in feminism, dieting to me became distasteful. However, I still needed to feel in control of my worth, so I adopted a vegetarian and sometimes vegan lifestyle.

This helped me feel morally upright. I couldn't acknowledge my lack of faith kept me living in sin, but I could firmly believe using animals for consumption was wrong because that still gave me control instead of God. I genuinely believed I had the moral high ground. I would look at anything Christians did and say, "But they still eat animals." I was lost in a sense of self-righteousness.

And the hole in my heart grew deeper.

A Man of God

There never had to be a hole in our hearts at all.

Putting faith in our trauma is what turned the trauma into a hole. Once I gave my "Amen" to "A woman will never love me" then my trauma became a hole.

I could have chosen to believe that God loved me, and that He would give me a woman that loved me.

A Woman of God

I could have chosen to believe that even when I was His enemy, God gave His Son to call me His own, and that there is nothing I could do to earn or lose His perfect love.

A Man of God

I could have forgiven those who traumatized me and chose to acknowledge without excuse the evil that I was doing to others.

A Woman of God

I could have forgiven those who traumatized me and chosen to acknowledge without excuse that I had turned my back

on God and filled my life with idol worship.

A Man of God

The holes in our hearts only started to exist in the moments that we chose to believe something other than what God said.

Yes, our trauma has made us prone to certain temptations, many of which are accompanied by overwhelming emotions, but those temptations are in no way part of us—and are in no way unstoppable forces:

> "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape so that you are able to bear it."[200]

The holes in our hearts continued to exist because we took as little blame as what was required.

This made us feel like we were innocent, when in fact we were placing more guilt on ourselves:

1. By calling God a liar (because our sin was big).

2. By condemning ourselves (because we were condemning others for doing the same kinds of things that we were doing).

Putting our faith in what we learned through experience kept us from putting faith in a God who loves us. Saying that our brokenness was caused by others kept us from a God that could change us.

200 1 Corinthians 10:13

12. Good Jealousy

Now, you may be wondering:

> "How does this all apply to me? My husband/wife is not someone that I can trust."

This may be true.

Maybe your spouse is someone who refuses to happily put you or God before themselves.

Maybe they have not even repented from sin in their life, so you can't hold on to the comfort of "They are a new person."

In fact, you may have been trying to guard your heart from these things:

1. Idolatry/a superficial relationship

You feel that relying on God to answer your prayers for earthly things is the same thing as loving those things more than God, or the same thing as having more than one god.

You feel that desiring your spouse to give you money, sex, to do the dishes—or whatever—is the same thing as loving those

things, and not really loving your spouse.

2. Trusting human beings

Even among God's people, you have never met anyone who has loved you without fail. You feel that:

> It makes no sense to expect them to love you, that trust will only lead to disappointment and pain, even theologically speaking,
>
> That it places a heavy burden on human beings, who do not always have the power to meet our needs,
>
> And/or that expecting human beings to love you is the same thing as revering them as you revere God, and therefore idolatry.

Even among God's people, you have confronted people about their sin or how they have hurt you, only for them to:

> Get hurt,
>
> Stumble in their faith,
>
> Lash out at you,
>
> Drift away from you,
>
> Ignore you,
>
> And/or dive even deeper into their behavior.

On the other hand, you have chosen to be silent about what you see and found that God eventually taught them –without your help.

> You feel that speaking up is an act of arrogance and impatience because only God can change

hearts.

You feel that expecting someone to change is the same thing as judging them, giving conditional love, or adding conditions to salvation.

Although all of these thoughts are similar to godly principles, they actually come from the desire to forfeit hope—because hoping is hard.

But "faith is the reality [assurance] of what is hoped for, the proof [conviction] of what is not seen."[201]

So, in order to have faith, we have to hope. And in order to please God, we have to have faith.[202]

Your comfort may not be that your spouse is loving you now, but the confidence that they will love you.

In this chapter, we will talk about why wanting things from God and others is not idolatry or superficial.

In the next chapter, we will talk about how trusting and confronting believers is actually building your foundation on Jesus,[203] and not the other way around.

Evil Jealousy

There are two different kinds of jealousy. One is evil, one is good. Although, both can result in sin.

Yes, there are things that are wrong to want.[204]

201 Hebrews 11:1

202 Hebrews 11:6

203 Matthew 7:24-27; Notice the word "teaching."

204 James 4:3

For example, it is evil to have sex with another man's wife—but it is also evil just to be jealous of another man for his wife.[205]

> This is an evil jealousy. The Bible calls it "coveting" or "envy." There is nothing good about it.

Coveting has layers; let's dive through some examples:

1. Comparing your possessions.

"You must not covet your neighbor's house."[206]

2. Comparing your story.

Don't be resentful[207] or angry at God because your friend got her healing even though you have been praying longer for it.

3. Comparing your sacrifice or sin.

Have you given so much that it is ridiculous for your spouse to ask for more?

You gave up so many big things for them, can they not just let you have this one small thing?

You can bet that attitude will be the end of your first love,[208] just as having that attitude with God will prevent you from entering Heaven.[209]

Some sins are definitely worse than others[210] (and harder for people to forgive), but only by accepting that even our smallest sins are so horrible that we deserve Hell[211] can we truly love.

205 Matthew 5:27-28

206 Exodus 20:17a

207 Joshua 1:9; Job 33:12-13

208 Song of Solomon 2:15

209 Matthew 7:21-23

210 John 19:11

211 1 Timothy 1:15

4. Comparing your ability.

It's not right to fault someone for making an honest mistake or for them to be incapable of meeting your needs.

Is it right for me to be upset with someone who is moving slowly in traffic because they're struggling to figure out how to merge?

Is it right for me to be upset with my wife if she is physically unable to have sex with me?

Just because I know it or can do it does not mean that they can. We are all human beings. We are not all-knowing or all-powerful—even when we are 100% doing the right thing.

5. Comparing your partner.

Is there someone more attractive than your partner?

Well, sorry to break it to you, but even if your spouse is the most attractive person in the world, then there will still be someone more attractive than them once you get used to how your spouse looks.

> This is true whether or not your spouse's appearance ever changes.
>
> This is true, even if the Mr./Ms. Sexier Than Your Spouse looks exactly as they did when your spouse was the most attractive person in the world.

This is because beauty is can only be determined by one of two things:

1. Vanity: Something is beautiful because you don't have it or can't get it easily (Coveting).

2. Appreciation: Something is beautiful because

> God created it with His perfect wisdom (Gratitude).

> A sunset is beautiful, whether you take the time to think about it or not. But, if you take the time to think about it, you will see that it is beautiful.

> It's perfectly beautiful, even though it does not look exactly like any other sunset.

It's one thing to be upset with your spouse for not doing what they can to make their body an intentional gift for you –they should.

But every man and woman was created by God –perfect in their own unique way.

You get to have exactly one spouse to appreciate (You are blessed to be t**he only one to get to** appreciate them![212]), so if you want the most beautiful mate in the world, then you have to see it.

I fear missing out on any opportunity that I have to enjoy my wife's beauty. I want all the happiness that I can have and all the love that I can give.

Whether or not my wife becomes more "classically" (vainly) beautiful, I will enjoy her body tomorrow, and know that I enjoyed her the most that I could have today, with no regrets.

And I will think of my own handsomeness/manliness/sexiness in the same way:

> Sex and life for your spouse is a lot better when you also believe that you are the most attractive person in the world.

6. Comparing your glory.

212 1 Corinthians 15:41

If you never got credit for a thing that you did, then you should not be bothered. In fact, you should be overjoyed—you should seek to get as little credit as possible.[213] Seeking credit is the worst thing that you could possibly do.

Of all the human needs, this is a need that only God can fulfill.

It's not wrong to want credit or glory. It's wrong to want it from men.

God may use men to give you credit,[214] but you should be so happy, because:

> Even on top of all of your wildest dreams coming true, God will share His glory with you in Heaven.[215]

Next time that you feel that you are getting cheated or shorted, remember this, and it will humble you.

Now, there is a difference between the temptation to covet and coveting.

Don't be discouraged! Just because you find yourself feeling like you want something evil does not mean that you are sinning in your heart. Even Jesus was tempted—yet without sin.

Yes, Jesus was tempted to covet, but He chose to find joy in what He had.

Gratefulness is a choice.

This does not mean that Jesus did not hope.

It means that Jesus did not get discouraged when His hope did not arrive as soon as He thought that He would have liked.

213 Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

214 Esther 6:10-11

215 Matthew 6:4, 6, 18; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:10-13

He was grateful for His present and His future. He was grateful for His story: the Father's best gift to Him.

Good Jealousy

It is good for a man to be jealous for his own wife—for him to want her to be faithful to him alone.

> But that good jealousy can lead to sin if, for example, he kills another man for sleeping with his wife.

It is this kind of good jealousy that causes most sin: idolatry. That is, putting an otherwise good desire above God and others.

God's jealousy for us is good. He desires for us to love Him. It is because of His jealousy that people burn in Hell.

> It is the just punishment for our sins, and so it is good. He is right to take revenge on all who do not love Him. He is Love itself, and His jealousy is an inseparable part of His love. He makes right all evil in the world.

Even if you have yet to be married, many of you fear that your spouse will cheat on you. You may even fear it more than their death.

If you could imagine, then you would see that there is no punishment great enough for it. If they burned in Hell for a million years, then it would not satisfy you.

> This is because you loved them above all others, so it hurts more that they would betray you than an offense from a stranger. No amount of suffering can take away what they have done and make things how they used to be.

> This is why those who commit adultery against God by sinning burn for eternity. He loves us more than anyone has ever loved anyone, and even our smallest sins are an offense to Him greater than adultery.

Jealousy is only part of love, though. Love puts others first, and that's what God did (and does) for us.

Good jealousy always seeks to be loved, but God's patience loves whether that happens or not.

We can never take revenge for ourselves. Only God has the right to punish. So, we must imitate God in His patience and steadfast love for us.

Still, good jealousy calls us to speak up for what we want.

God spoke to us about right and wrong—what He wants—before we knew Him, and He still speaks to us as we are being transformed each day.

He calls us out of our sin to submit to his jealous love.

In the same way, Jesus teaches us to be jealous for our brother:[216] We speak up so that he may choose to love God and to love us.[217]

Idolatry

It is not idolatry to want food, forgiveness, or guidance.

In fact, these are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with God.

> BUT. It is idolatry to trust/seek something outside

216 2 Corinthians 11:2

217 James 5:19-20

of God to meet these needs.

> Maybe you trust overtime to put food on the table, so you skip out on church.
>
> Maybe you trust your own works to earn you forgiveness, so you volunteer extra hours at the church when you should be resting or spending time with your family.
>
> Maybe you trust the internet for guidance, so you let Google and bloggers teach you what would make you respectable.

You can't even enjoy the gifts of a relationship with God because you are getting it all from somewhere else.

This is all idolatry.

It's not idolatry to obey or worship. That is, if you are worshipping God, obeying Him, or obeying the authority which He has placed over you.

Obedience and worship are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with God.

BUT. Each of us are ruled by something,[218] and it is idolatry to be ruled by anything other than God.

> Maybe you obey or measure yourself by your earthly father's way of thinking, instead of God's.
>
> Maybe you are weighed down by

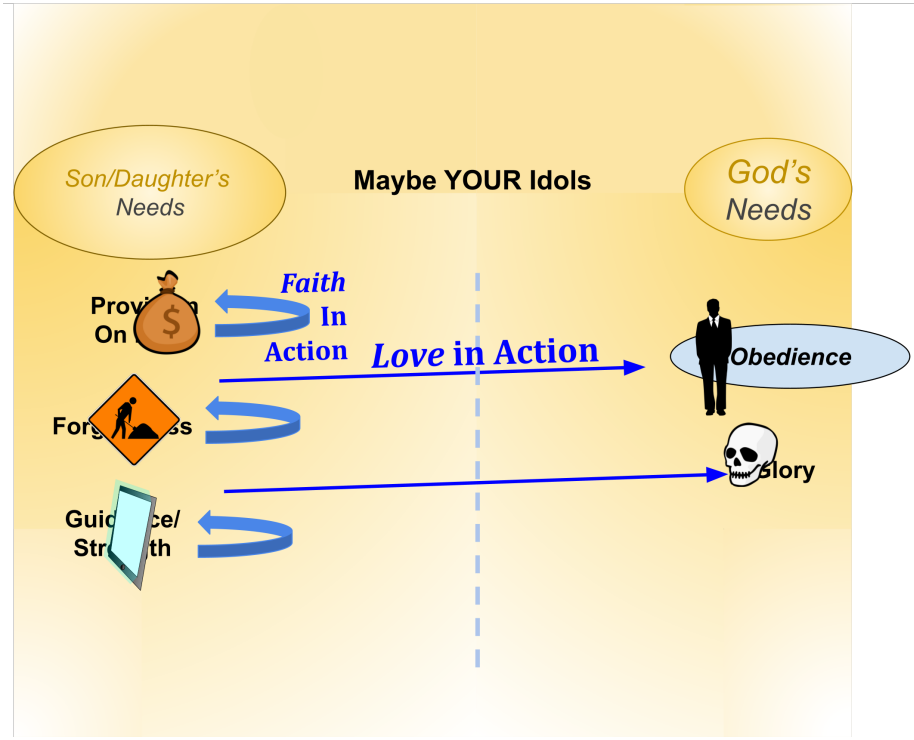
218 Romans 6:16

the greatness of your sin, instead of being weighed down with the awe of God's saving work.

Maybe you literally worship or pray to people who have died, gods, demons, or the universe.

You have nothing to give God because you have given it all away already.

This is all idolatry.



Now, it is not only idolatry to put other people/things above God:

It is idolatry to love people outside of the order which God ordained as "love."

For example, it is idolatry to put the opinion of other women (or your own opinion) over your wife's opinion, when it comes to, say your haircut:

> "A husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does."[219]

Now of course, God's opinion, if He has one, supersedes even the wife's opinion of his haircut:

> ""We must obey God rather than [human beings]."[220]

To love out of order is idolatry because you are allowing yourself or other people/things to be your god: To obey them rather than God.

Getting a haircut that most women think is attractive when your wife thinks otherwise? That is idolatry because you have decided to submit to those women, rather than God.

They have become your god in this situation.

You have not just put those women over your wife, but you have put those women over God by putting them over your wife.[221]

In the same way, God has designed an order of love for every relationship in our lives:

Himself over all.[222]

219 1 Corinthians 7:4b

220 Acts 5:29b

221 Matthew 22:34-40 ("The second is like it")

222 Exodus 20:3

Your family before all others (especially your spouse[223] and children).[224]

Believers before nonbelievers.[225]

Those who cannot repay you before those who can.[226]

Those in need before those who are not.[227]

Those who you will not always have before those who are in need.[228]

Authority.[229]

Everyone before yourself.[230]

You really need God's help to understand what all of that means for your own life, but I will explain what He helps me to explain to you.

I will use the relationship of a husband and wife as an example:

It's not idolatry for a man to make sacrifices, openly communicate, give affection, and put initiative into developing a relationship.

In fact, these are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with his wife.

BUT. It is idolatry to give what belongs to his wife to someone else.

223 1 Corinthians 7:32-34; Genesis 2:24

224 1 Timothy 5:8

225 Galatians 6:10

226 Luke 14:12-14

227 2 Corinthians 8:13-14

228 Matthew 26:11; Matthew 22:39 ("Neighbor")

229 Romans 13:1-2; Ephesians 5:22-24, 6:1-3, 5-8; Hebrews13:17

230 Philippians 2:3

Maybe he sacrifices his time with her for money instead of sacrificing money for her.

Maybe he gives his attention to sports, instead of putting the screen away to take time to talk to his wife.

Maybe he flirts with his receptionist but never flirts with his own wife anymore.

Maybe he spends extra hours building a ministry at the church, but it never crosses his mind to build his relationship with his wife.

He has nothing to give his wife because he has given all that he has away already.

This is all idolatry: love out of order.

It is not idolatry for a man to want honor, sex, partnership, or domestic support.

In fact, these are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with his wife.

BUT. It is idolatry to trust/seek something outside of his wife to meet these needs.

Maybe he trusts in his own hand more than his own wife to honor him, so he beats her.

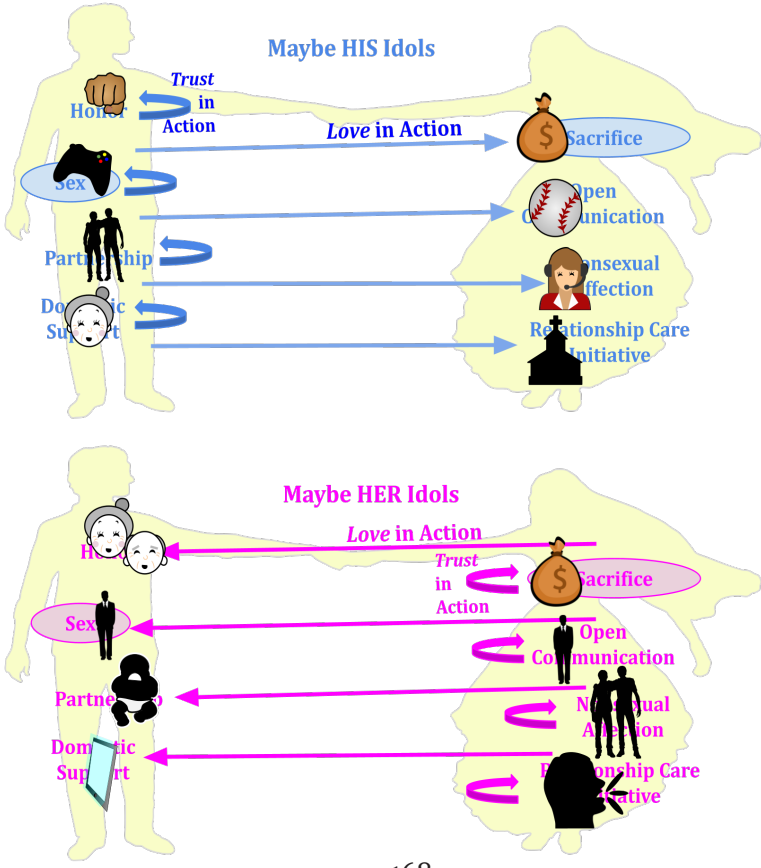
Maybe he seeks video games before sex with his wife, so when she gives him affection, he is annoyed.

Maybe he puts friendship with other guys above his friendship with her, so they really don't know each other well anymore.

Maybe he still relies on his mom to take care of him, so he never gets to experience the joy of being served by his wife.

He can't even enjoy the gifts of marriage because he is getting it all from somewhere else.

This is all a form of idolatry: love out of order.



It's not idolatry for a woman to give honor, sex, partnership, and domestic support.

In fact, these are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with her husband.

BUT. It is idolatry to give what belongs to her husband to something else.

> Maybe she holds her parents' opinions higher than her husbands', so she disobeys him and talks in a way that shows that she does not admire his abilities or character.
>
> Maybe she is desiring the qualities of men on TV or Instagram, so she does not enjoy or have much interest in sex with her husband.
>
> Maybe she is more devoted to developing a relationship with her kids than her husband, so he is lonely.
>
> Maybe she is more interested in her phone than using her time to take care of the house or cook for her husband.

She has nothing to give her husband because she has given all that she has away already.

This is all idolatry: love out of order.

It is not idolatry for a woman to want consistent, sacrificial love, open communication, nonsexual affection, and relationship-care initiative.

In fact, these are very good things: They are what it means to have a relationship with her husband.

BUT. It is idolatry to trust/seek something outside of her husband to meet these needs.

> Maybe she trusts in money more than in her husband's willingness to sacrifice for her, so she hides money under the bed in case she has to leave him someday.
>
> Maybe she is getting open communication from a man with whom she is having an affair.
>
> Maybe she is seeking all of her compassion and tenderness from her friends, and never gives her husband the opportunity to be sweet because she feels that it is too much to expect from men.
>
> Maybe she trusts more in her own ability to punish her husband than she does in him taking initiative in their relationship, so she has a sharp tongue that goads him into doing what she thinks he should.

She can't even enjoy the gifts of marriage because she is getting it all from somewhere else.

This is all a form of idolatry: love out of order.

So you can see, it's not idolatry to trust or love human beings; it is idolatry to trust and love them outside of the order which God demands.

By loving out of order, we choose to be ruled by what we elevate above its place. Therefore, we elevate it above God's commands, and therefore God.

By trusting out of order, we choose to drink from wells other than God's.

Good Conflict

There is only one way to keep first love going:

Fighting.

> "Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens."[231]

I fight against Satan in my wife. I fight against Satan in me.

She fights against Satan in me. She fights against Satan in herself.

Now, I am not saying that we are possessed, but our Old Man is still in us,[232] and our Old Man is in complete agreement with Satan. Our Old Man is a citizen of Satan's kingdom.

Because my Flesh is still in me, when I am upset by something that my wife has done, that can mean more than one thing:

Maybe she has just sinned.

Maybe I am the one sinning.

231 Ephesians 6:12

232 1 John 1:8

Maybe we are both in sin.

Maybe it is just a misunderstanding.

This is why Jesus says:

> "First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."[233]

I do not accuse her because we don't know that she has sinned.

However, I do not stay silent because, if the sin is in her heart or mine, it needs to come out.

She does the same to me.

If we can't immediately talk, we choose to believe the best in each other until we can talk, trusting the work of God's Spirit.

> Also, we use time like that to consider with prayer whether-or-not the sin is in our own heart—or that it's just a misunderstanding!

When the opportunity comes, though, we ask one another to help remove the log from our eyes. You don't have to do it our way, but we have a template. We say:

"When you ___"

> We point out one specific thing that the other said or did. Not a pattern. Not three things. Not two.
>
> This is because by the time you get to two things, you have already built a case. You are not listening; you are trying to prove that what

233 Matthew 7:5

you feel is what actually happened.

This is part of why it's so important to speak up every time and not "let things slide." Letting things slide is not equal to grace, but can actually be a root of bitterness.[234]

The other part is that—if sometimes you speak up and sometimes you don't, then you are really going to confuse your spouse about what you want. They should be able to trust that your smiles and your silence mean that things are good.

"When you asked me to wash the dishes…"

"I felt ___"

This is what makes it not an accusation.

"…I felt helpless…"

"Because ___"

Explain why you feel this way. Let loose, but don't sin.

"…Because I was just talking about how exhausted I was…"

"I want ___"

This is the important part. This is where you find out where the sin

234 Hebrews 12:14-15

is, if there is any.

Explain what you want. Does that line up with what the Bible says that love is?

"When you asked me to wash the dishes, I felt helpless because I was just talking about how exhausted I was…"

(A) "…I don't want to have to do all the chores in the house."

(Sin exposed in self)

(B) "…I want to feel like you are happy to help me."

(Miscommunication, or opportunity for the other to confess.)

We also use words like "seems," "feels like," and "Help me understand:"

> "It seems like you don't want to do the dishes. You said that you were going to do them but have left them in a sink for a while. Can you help me understand?"

Of course, all of this can only work if the other person trusts that you are being genuine. The temptation to believe that the other person is sarcastically accusing you, talking down to you, or deliberately not understanding you can be present.

You have to be genuine and patient, and choose to trust that the other person will be genuine and patient.

You also have to be willing to answer every question, no mat-

ter how many.

Accusation is wrong,[235] but questions always have to be welcomed if communication is going to work.

If no one is accusing you, then you should not be offended. Even if they did accuse you, there is nothing that they can accuse you of that is worse than a sin that you have actually committed.

We should not be insulted for others to acknowledge that we may need help or that we have sin in us.

> This is why prayer is also so important in conflict. No man has the power of himself to fix himself or someone else, but we trust that God will use and speak to us.

Conflict doesn't always feel like conflict.

There have been many times when I was terrified that whatever I was going to ask my wife would crush her, and she was not even a little offended.

I'll ask her about her feelings about a conflict that we just finished, and she will be genuinely confused:

> "What conflict?" She'll say.

In fact, I have been surprised to hear this from her and from friends which I have confronted, when I feel that I may have crushed their feelings:

> "Thank you for encouraging me."

The whole truth is always encouraging to a believer. Although, that is not to say that anyone, including my wife, has always been happy with me (at first) for doing the right thing.

235 James 1:19

Lots of conflict is not a sign of an unhealthy relationship. Some days, weeks, and months, you just have to fight harder for your first love than other times.

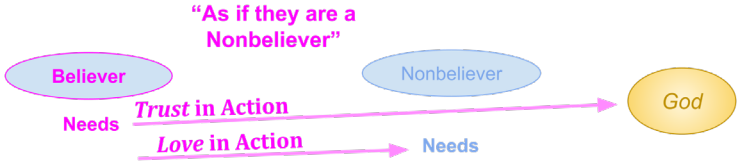
Satan will do what he can to cause any division between believers, married couples included. A couple can be put through a lifetime of conflict just because they are doing the right thing.

Not to mention, Kelsey and I are so deep in sin without realizing it that we will never be done growing, until we are called home.[236] Of course we should not be surprised that we still have sin to repent of.

That sounds like a lot of work? It is. I knew that it would be a lot, but I never could have imagined how much. But my wife is worth so much more than the cost that it is not even worth comparing.

I will die as many times as it takes to be one with her.

Trust in its Different Forms



236 Philippians 1:6

This is the situation that a lot of believers find themselves in with their spouse:

Either their spouse is not a believer, or they refuse to listen.

If you have already followed all of the steps which I am about to tell you, you should not keep confronting them. After Jesus teaches us to get the speck out of our believing **brother's** eye, He **immediately** warns us **not to even attempt** at the speck in an unrepentant person's eye:

> "Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces."[237]

Expect them to disappoint you, until they repent.

All that you can and should do is happily love them givingly,[238] and giving the most that you can, without counting.

This is a very hard thing to do, and I am very thankful that I have never had to live like this with my wife for more than a night. I know people who have done it for decades.

Still, the other situation can also be very hard:

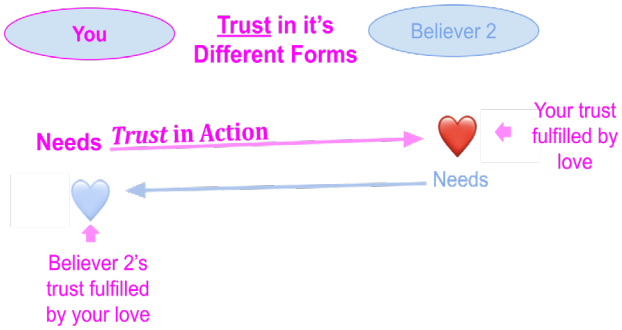
> Trusting your believing spouse who has repented.
>
> None of us want to be hurt again.
>
> It can be hard to trust even if your spouse hasn't done anything wrong, but it can be especially hard if:
>
> > They said that they would stop before and haven't.

237 Matthew 7:6

238 1 Peter 3:1

They did something extra hurtful or evil.

They have been doing the same thing for a long time.



This is the ideal situation with you and your spouse.

At best, this situation is nothing less than a real-life fairytale. You would cross an ocean just to make the other person smile, and you know that they would do the same for you.

At worst, this situation is an extremely painful fight of faith.

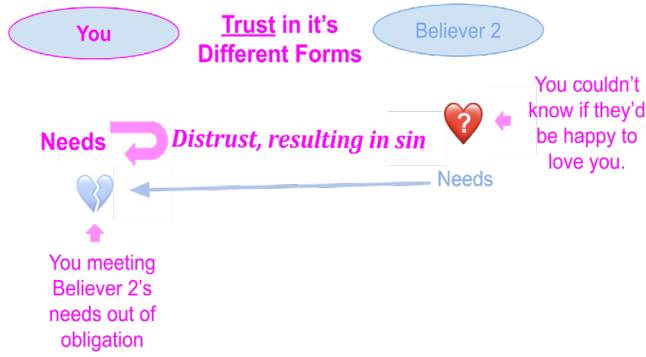
There have been times where, sometimes even with no evidence, I have felt so strongly that Kelsey does not/will not love me the way that I would like her to.

I have had to hang on to nothing but a blind faith that she is not sinning when all of the evidence points to something else—or my emotions are piled on top of me like elephants, trying to convince me that she is doing something wrong.

And after persevering, I learned (sometimes

through much effort in a conversation) that she was actually cherishing me in her heart, and she did come through.

It doesn't matter whether trusting is easy or hard to you. What matters is that you trust. That's what keeps first love alive.


You
Trust in it's Different Forms
Believer 2
You couldn't know if they'd be happy to love you.
Needs
Distrust, resulting in sin
Needs
You meeting Believer 2's needs out of obligation

This is the log and the speck situation.

"Trust" means a few things here:

Speak up when you have a want or need, no matter how life-changingly big, how small and petty, or how many.

Speak up when you are upset or concerned about something that your spouse said or did.

Assume that they are doing the best thing when you are not looking.[239]

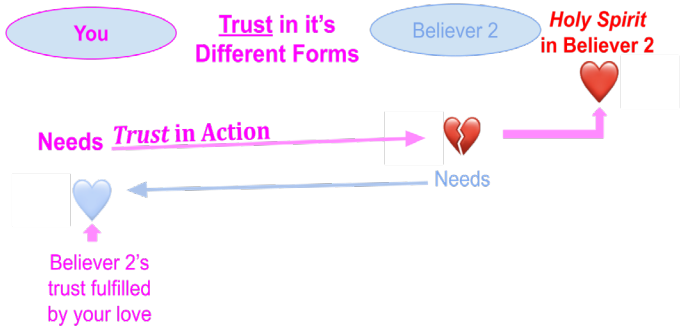
If they do break your trust or sin without knowing it, then you confront them:

You trust that the Holy Spirit will win them over.[240]

239 2 Thessalonians 3:4

240 Phillipians 2:12

In other words, assume that their heart is soft: Trust that your words will be all that it takes for them to repent.



Now, I have this listed as one step, but Jesus divides this step into three:

1. "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

2. "But if he won't listen, take one or two more with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.

3. "If he pays no attention to them, tell the church."[241]

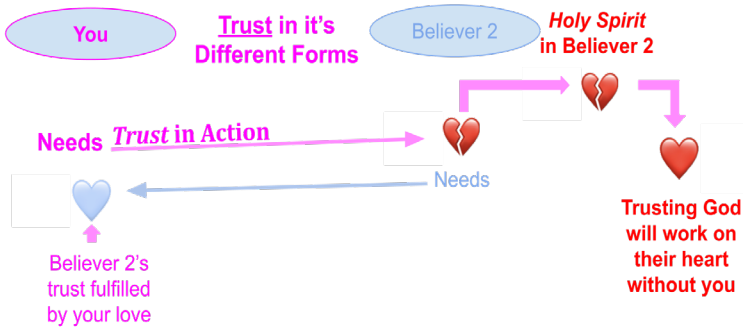
I have actually had to walk through this process myself a couple of times.

I had to initiate it, but through seeking good conflict with my Christian brothers, I actually end-

241 Matthew 18:15-17a

ed up finding out that I was in the wrong once—which is still a win for me!

Because I became more unified with my brother.



If confrontation doesn't work, then Jesus gives us one final step:

> "But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you."[242]

At this point, we are done trying to convince their brother. We leave God to do the work in his life, without us.[243]

> Treating someone like a nonbeliever means to love them, but not to trust them. They have shown that they will not listen.
>
> This means that we put up boundaries. But godly boundaries are not

242 Matthew 18:17b

243 1 Corinthians 5; Mark 2:26-32

> for pushing people away—they are gloves that allow us to get as close as possible without getting pricked. God knows your heart and will not excuse you for pushing people away or giving up on them.
>
> Also, we do not endorse flagrant sinners as Christians –since someone who claims to be a believer but acts like a nonbeliever is poisonous to the souls of all believers and nonbelievers who they come into contact with. If they are outspoken Christians, we kick them out of the church, until they repent.[244]

When it comes to your spouse, treating them like a nonbeliever does not mean divorcing them or kicking them out of your house:

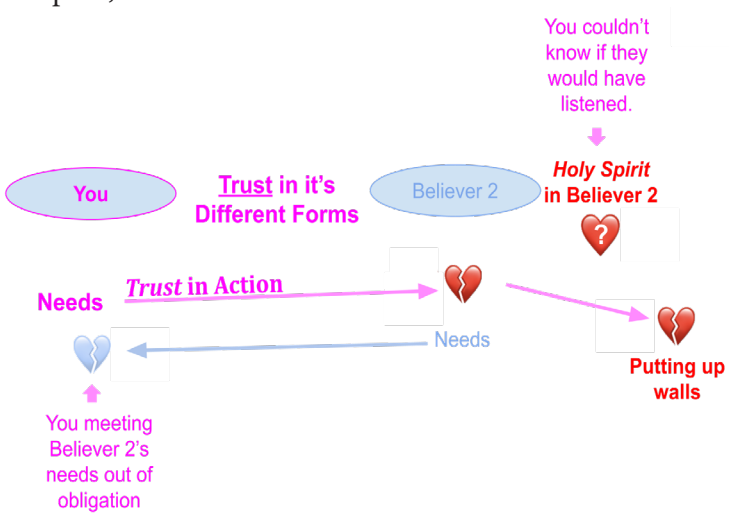
> "I command the married—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to leave his wife. But I (not the Lord) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not leave her. Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her, she must not leave her husband. For the unbelieving husband is set apart for God by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is set apart for God by the husband. Otherwise, your children would be corrupt, but now they are set apart for God. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace. For you,

244 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Matthew 18:17

> wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Or you, husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?"[245]

And again:

> "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the Christian message, they may be won over without a message by the way their wives live when they observe your pure, reverent lives."[246]



You cannot skip all of the steps of confrontation and "just rely on God alone."

If I need to confront my wife, I cannot love her until I genuinely decide to confront her when I get the chance.

Otherwise, I can only serve her grudgingly. There is no way around it:

> That is how God designed love; to draw us closer

245 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

246 1 Peter 3:1-2

to one another.

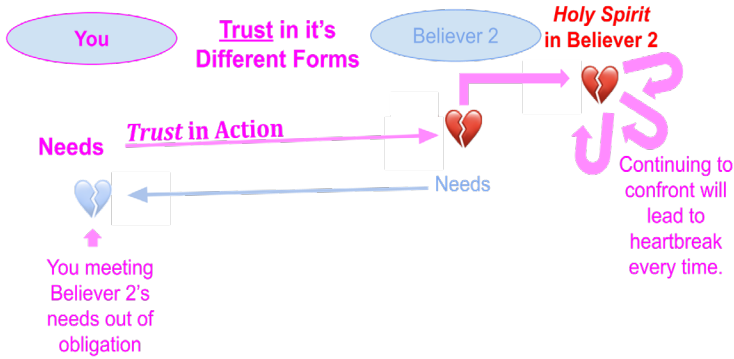
I cannot muscle myself into loving her when love demands that now is the time to be loved by her.

> Yes, I can love her if she is treating me badly.
>
> Yes, if she suddenly becomes unable to move or speak, God will even give me the power to serve her for the rest of my life, without being served myself.

But when love means speaking up, you can go no further until you speak up.

Not only is not speaking up a sin,[247] but it traps you in sin.

Every "good" thing that you do becomes obligation—points gained to compare to points forfeited[248]—straw to be burned up on the Day of Judgement.[249]



That being said, if you already have walked through the steps of confrontation which you could, and they still haven't re-

247 James 4:17

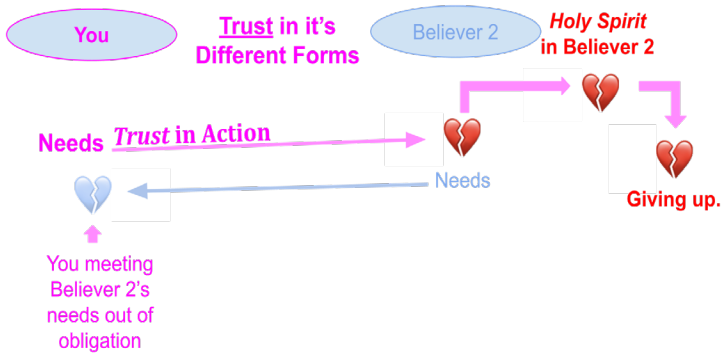
248 Luke 10:40; Luke 15:29

249 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Matthew 7:21-23

pented, please follow Jesus' instructions:

> Treat them like a nonbeliever.
>
> "For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? But God judges outsiders."[250]

Continuing to confront your unrepentant spouse will lead to heartbreak every time. You are not God, and you are not going to convince them, no matter how perfect your evidence or argument is.



That being said, trusting God and giving up are not the same thing.

You cannot let go of the hope that God will lead them to repentance.

If you do give up in your heart, then you will be unable to love your spouse.

Every "good" thing that you do becomes obligation—points gained to compare to points forfeited—straw to be burned up on the Day of Judgement.

250 1 Corinthians 5:12-13a

You will find that you only reach out to love them when you have to, and your definition of "have to" will get more and more narrow.

If Kelsey were to decide to stop giving me sex freely, for example, and I chose to give up on faith that God would one day change her heart, then:

> All of the chores I do for her, flowers I buy her, and sacrifices that I make for her can only become points that I add up for myself to compare to her neglect of me. I can only do those things:
>
> > resentfully,
> >
> > to shame her,
> >
> > to make myself feel like I am better than her,
> >
> > to make myself look better than her to my friends when I talk about her,
> >
> > or to pressure her into giving me sex.
>
> But if I choose to trust that God will change her heart, looking forward to the reward of her freely-given love is more than enough to make me forget what loving her costs me.

Trust at each stage is required in order to truly love.

Apologies & Genuine Repentance

Trusting and forgiving someone means that you are leaving yourself vulnerable to maybe get hurt.

"What if they do it again?"

Well, you just have to trust that they won't.

That being said, there are some apologies that you should not accept.

Not that an apology is always required for complete reconciliation,[251] but an apology lets the person that you are apologizing to know that they can trust you. Often, if you don't apologize, others have a good reason not to trust you, and might not be wrong for withholding their trust.

It is wrong to bring up the past, making people pay for their sin with guilt. Letting someone know "how much they hurt you" is not as gratifying as it may seem.

But wanting a bold, humble apology is not the same thing. It is something that people should be able to expect from you, and you should not fault them for wanting it. It is not judgmental nor a form of punishment to talk with someone to be sure that they have actually repented.[252]

Repentance is in the heart, so you can't always tell whether it is real.

But real repentance has some distinct (and rare) features:

1. It doesn't make excuses. It takes all the blame.

   If I apologize for saying something ugly to my wife "but I'm having a bad day" or "but you said something ugly to me first," then I'm not really apologizing.

251 Genesis 45:5

252 John 21:15-19

Even if my wife does not repent at all, I still take full blame for my wrongs, even if what she did is worse than what I did.

If when I talk about my past sin, I am talking about the people that tempted me or made it hard for me not to sin, then I am blaming them for what I did.

2. It's forthcoming about all of the bad.

   If I hide anything that would make what I did look worse when apologizing, then I'm not really apologizing. I'm getting away with what I can.

3. It hates the sin.

   If I brag or make jokes about my sin after apologizing—then I am not being sorry for it. My sin was not cute.

   If I repent for sleeping with another woman, but I still compare sex with her to my own wife, or talk about what I liked about it, then my sin is still part of me.

   All of the pleasurable things that came from our sin, or the things that worldly people brag about, we count as shame—and thank God they were washed from us.

4. It doesn't mind giving you assurance. In fact, it likes having assurance for itself.

   Should I be offended if my wife wants to have my location on her phone? Does that mean that she doesn't trust me?

   No. That means that I want the freedom to do

things behind her back. Things that she probably would not like.

In fact, it comforts me to know that she can know where I am at all times. This is because I am confident that what I do when she is not around will please her.

Not only that, but I remember that I still have sin in me. Knowing that my wife can see my location makes it less tempting for me to go somewhere that I shouldn't. As a man of God, less temptation is comforting to me.

> Maybe my wife does want my location because she doesn't trust me or is punishing me. That would be her sin, and I can ask her about that.
>
> But even if she insists on this sin, if I am freely giving,[253] then I would happily give her what she wants anyway.

5. It is decisive.

   I can't tell my wife:

   > "I'll try not to cheat on you again."

   She would be right to leave me.[254]

   In the same way, I cannot say:

   > "I'll try to stop losing my patience with you."

253 Matthew 5:38-42

254 Matthew 19:9

What I'm really saying is:

> "I'll stop, until it gets too hard to stop. Then, I'll probably do it."

That is not repentance. I have to make the decision to stop.

If the Gospel is true, and I believe it, then I have no reason to believe that I will lose my patience again. Even if I have apologized a million times before.

God has made me new.

I have the power to be patient, every time.

Even If

Jesus only gave us the option for divorce if our spouse cheats on us.

I always took this to mean that if my future wife ever cheated, then I am free to hit the road as fast as possible.

That does not really make sense though:

> What if my wife were to cheat, I forgave her, and then 50 years later I decided to leave over for a small fight about doing the dishes?
>
> Well, don't I have the right to leave whenever I want because of what she did?
>
> No!

Flashback to when I was getting ready to marry my wife:

> God revealed to me that, if my wife repents, then

He still requires me to stay with her:

> "If your brother sins, rebuke him,
> and if he repents, forgive him. And
> if he sins against you seven times
> in a day, and comes back to you
> seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you
> must forgive him."[255]

This demand also comes with comfort:

> Even if she did cheat, it was not her doing it. And the proof is her repentance.
>
> Nothing can change the fact that I am, always have been, and always will be her one and only.
>
> If she were to cheat and I were to say, "God, I don't understand; I broke her hymen on our wedding night. Now it's lost."
>
> The answer would be, "No, she is just as pure now as she was then."
>
> This is true for all believers who repent.

I decided that I would forgive her if she cheated on me.

> I was not giving her permission to cheat on me; I would not have married her if I had any reason to think that she might.

I also asked her if she would forgive me if I cheated.

I knew then that I could not marry her unless she said "yes:"

> Because of my sinful nature, I could not trust someone who was not committed to forgiving me

255 Luke 17:3-4

no matter what I did.

A Woman of God

Because of my strong love for him, I had already decided that I would forgive him if he cheated, although it was difficult for me to say out loud. At first it seemed that making this decision was giving him permission to cheat, but I knew it wasn't. I made the decision to commit to him and myself that I would love and forgive him no matter what, the same way God loves and forgives us. Otherwise, it would not be love.

A Man of God

The truth is that there is no "extra credit" love when it comes to God:[256]

> You cannot say "I know that God would like for me to do this, but He doesn't say that I 'have to,' so I am going to do what I want to do." That would be a sin.[257]

> This is just as I cannot love my wife by doing anything less than taking every opportunity to love her.[258]

True Forgiveness & Mercy

Most of us have thought that we have forgiven someone, only to learn later on that we have not truly forgiven.

If you are like me, then God has shown you throughout your life different parts of what forgiveness really means.

256 Luke 17:7-10

257 James 4:17

258 Luke 6:31

What I am about to say will be the same experience again for many of you.

If my wife sins against me, and I forgive her, then I have to be the one to give.

Say that we just got in a conflict, and she was in the wrong.

She apologizes.

Now, I have to be the one to initiate:

A kiss.

Sex.

Or giving love of any kind:

> "If anyone has caused pain, he has caused pain not so much to me but to some degree—not to exaggerate—to all of you. The punishment inflicted by the majority is sufficient for that person. As a result, **you should instead forgive and comfort him. Otherwise, this one may be overwhelmed by excessive grief. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love to him**. I wrote for this purpose: to test your character to see if you are obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I do too. For what I have forgiven—if I have forgiven anything—it is for you in the presence of Christ."[259]

259 2 Corinthians 2:5-10

Why must I give? Because I have to show my wife that I really do forgive her.

Otherwise, I am fooled into fake love by Satan[260] – because she is earning my love back, whether by:

Her having to show affection first.

Or by me making her suffer by giving her the silent treatment.

Not only that, but that is how I must treat her even if she does not repent:

"'You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

"'You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?'"[261]

If I tell myself that I don't "have to" do something for my wife

260 2 Corinthians 2:11, in the context of verses 5-10

261 Matthew 5:38-47

to prove that I have forgiven her, that is proof that I actually should do that—just as I would treat her on the day that I was most excited to love her.

This is how God loved us:

> Not only did He forgive us, but He gave, and without limit.[262]
>
> It's one thing to spare sinners from Hell. But to give them Heaven?

Many of us have the wrong definition of mercy.

> "Mercy," as the Bible uses the word, doesn't stop at not giving someone the punishment that they deserve. In fact, it doesn't always necessarily have to be a direct response to sin[263]—and this is how mercy is walked out most of the time in our daily lives.[264]
>
> Mercy goes on to give after forgiving, and it gives even when sin is not involved—just because there is an opportunity to give. It gives the maximum. The only thing that limits this giving is how much someone is willing to accept.[265] This is the mercy that God expects us to have on others.

English translations of the Bible sometimes translate "mercy" as "compassion."

> (HCSB) "But the Lord was gracious to them, had **compassion** on them, and turned toward them."[266]

262 Romans 8:32

263 Luke 18:38

264 Matthew 7:12

265 Psalm 81:16

266 2 Kings 13:23

(NLT) "But the Lord was gracious and **merciful** to the people of Israel."

(HCSB) "If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that…. Be merciful, just as your Father also is **merciful**."[267]

(NLT) "You must be compassionate, just as your Father is **compassionate**."

Compassion is warmth that drives you into action.

God does not just feel compassion for the wicked, He acts on it, and He commands us to do the same.

God demands that we find warmth in us –and not only to feel it, but to act on it.

Forgiveness is not for you. Although yes, it does heal your spirit from sickness.

But that sickness is designed by God to drive you closer to your offender.

We have often let that sickness drive us away from our offenders, but God, desperate for us, recognized that we were more than worth the pain.

If you are going to say that you belong to God, then you are like Him. That means that you too must recognize that your offenders are more than worth the pain of loving them—while they hate, mistreat, or neglect you—just as God loves us when we hate, mistreat, and neglect Him.

267 Luke 6:33, 36

Forgiveness is a giving act of genuine compassion. **Forgiveness is for the person that you are forgiving, as God's forgiveness is for us.**

Love always gives, but it has to give when it forgives.

Marriage Love: The Church's Last Fortress

The Church is at war with the kingdom of Hell. Our only weapons are faith[268] and love.[269] Although, the two are the same.[270] And these are what Satan seeks to destroy.

The Church was made to attack Hell, not the other way around.[271] The front lines are our love for nonbelievers.

Marriage is not the front lines of the war, but the very back. It is our last fortress, if Hell were to attack us.

The truth is that right now Hell is attacking marriage's walls. It has already destroyed our armies.

The love of brothers has been devastated over the course of the last 2,000 years. The Church is broken into countless divisions of theology, and even those within the same denominations are splintered further by bitterness and indifference. Not many Christians show any desire to be united with one another.

After great success, Hell has been seeking to destroy marriage for the last 100 years—the last step in wiping away the memory of the meaning of love from Earth.

> I say that marriage is not the front lines because marriage takes a lot of time and effort which keeps us who are married from doing other things that

268 Revelation 12:11

269 Matthew 22:40

270 1 John 4:19; Galatians 5:6b

271 Matthew 16:18-19

we could be doing for God.[272]

Marriage is a heavy burden (although I do not consider it a burden) because the pain that comes with it is more painful than what is usually experienced in any other relationship. To be wounded by your husband or wife hurts more than an offense from a stranger or even a close friend.

It is this pain that pushes many people away from marriage, even their own marriage. But it is also this pain that causes many people to fight for their relationship with their spouse.

People go to marriage counseling, not friendship counseling.

It is also uncommon for two friends to feel more affection for one another or be devoted to one another than for a sexual partner. That is why David remarks how unique Jonathan's love was,[273] being that it was nonsexual.

It is because of these things that marriage preserves the meaning of love:

- Love fights for unity.

This is not always obvious when the pain of separation for a friendship is not as great as it is within a marriage.

- Love is eager and delighted to put others before oneself and is full of affection.

This is not always obvious because the compulsion to serve and to think highly of someone is usually

272 1 Corinthians 7:32-34

273 2 Samuel 1:26

stronger when sexual love is involved.

This adoration can only come with honor:

> "Love each other with genuine affection. Take delight in honoring one another."[274]

This honor is nothing less than the truth of perfection the Christ has won for your brother.[275] The man says of the woman:

> "You are absolutely beautiful, my darling, with no imperfection in you."[276]

And also:

> "Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the young women."[277]

Now, if you saw the woman whom this scripture is referring to, you might be able to perceive a flaw in her.

But through the eyes of love, which the world's wisdom considers foolish, the man only sees what is good.

It's the love of Christ that sees us in this way:

> "Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, 'Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him.'"[278]

And God, who is not only love, but the dictator of all that is

274 Romans 12:10

275 John 1:47; 3 John 1:12

276 Song of Solomon 4:7

277 Song of Solomon 2:9

278 John 1:47

true, is doing nothing other than describing what is true.[279]

According to faith (or in the Son of God's case, knowledge) in what is not seen, Philip is not a sinner;[280] Philip is a man of complete integrity. This was made true by God's power to transform,[281] since God transformed Philip by the power of the Cross and Resurrection (though without having been filled with the Holy Spirit) even before[282] he met Jesus in His human form.

That is why Jesus speaks this way about Philip, and that is why we speak this way of our brothers:

> John said, "Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. And we also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true."[283]

But even with faith and wonder in the miracle of our brother's perfection, we must fight for first love with him as we do our spouse:

> "Be in agreement with [other believers]."
>
> "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement allow you to live in harmony with one another, according to the command of Christ Jesus, **so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice.**"
>
> "I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you

279 1 John 3:20

280 Romans 7:17

281 2 Corinthians 4:6

282 Romans 3:25

283 3 John 1:12

be united with the same understanding and the same conviction."

"[God has put the body together] so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other."

"Brothers, rejoice. Become mature, be encouraged, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

"I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us."

"[God gave us leaders in the Church so that we can be trained to reconcile with, strengthen, and love other believers] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness."

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal."

"Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness—without it no one will see the Lord. Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many. And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for one meal."

> "[Worldly wisdom is causing your church's divisions,] but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace."
>
> "Finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble, not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you can inherit a blessing…
>
> "For the one who wants to love life and to see good days… must seek peace and pursue it."[284]

Faith is our only hope of restoration with our brothers. Having faith that God's love is big enough to answer such a prayer is the most that we can do—and He will do it!

No strategy will bring God's people to unity, but our faith will be expressed in actions when the opportunity comes. You can show your faith by fighting for first love exactly as the Scriptures prescribe.

284 Romans 12:16a, 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12:25; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:1-3, 13; Philippians 2:1-2; Hebrews 12:14-16; James 3:17-18; 1 Peter 3:8-11; among others which I could have listed in this series.

13. Jesus' Crazy Dream

Is there anything that you have been praying for for a long time?

Are you trusting God for a spouse? For your loved ones to know Jesus? To be healed of a sickness?

Good![285]

What did Jesus pray for, in His earthly life?

> "I pray not only for these,
>
> but also for those who believe in Me
>
> through their message.
>
> May they all be one,
>
> as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You.
>
> May they also be one in Us,
>
> so the world may believe You sent Me.

285 Proverbs 15:8

I have given them the glory You have given Me.

May they be one as We are one.

I am in them and You are in Me.

May they be made completely one,

so the world may know You have sent Me

and have loved them as You have loved Me."[286]

Wow. Your dreams probably seem more possible than that.

God has given people wives. He's saved souls. He's raised the dead. But the world has no memory of a Church like this:

> "Just as I [, Jesus] have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."[287]

Wow. Not by miracles. Not by evangelism. Not by our love for nonbelievers. Not by a private fire for Jesus. Not by governments changing. Although, these things certainly do all have merit.[288] All people will **know that we are His disciples** by our love for one another.

Jesus is not talking about Christians loving all people. Yes, we are commanded to do that.[289] But Jesus is talking about Christians loving Christians.

In fact, there is a lot throughout the New Testament which is specifically written to show how our relationship with believ-

286 John 17:20-23

287 John 13:34-35

288 1 Corinthians 14:24-25; Romans 10:14-15; Romans 2:4b; Matthew 9:38; Luke 22:31-32; 1 Timothy 2:1-4

289 Matthew 22:39

ers is different than just loving all people.[290]

(Pay attention to this context when you read!)

This was done with a goal in mind; Paul said to the churches:

> "I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ."[291]

And:

> "God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them."[292]

Answer these for yourself:

- Does the world know Christians as people that love other Christians?[293]
- If Jesus came back right now, is your worldwide spiritual family– the brothers and sisters that Christ gave to you – Are we a gift for Him that you would be proud of?
- Do you think that the Jews are jealous of the kingdom that we have become?

I don't need to explain myself.

We have a confession:

290 General overview provided in "Different Loves" in this book's Addendum.

291 2 Corinthians 11:2

292 Romans 10:19; Deuteronomy 32:21

293 In His prayer that we would be One, we know that Jesus was not talking about an unseen unity that believers share because they each have the same Holy Spirit—because Jesus says "so that the world may know." The World cannot see what is unseen.

We did not write this book to help you have a better relationship with your husband or wife.

We wrote this book so that you can have a better relationship with all of God's people.

It was a trick!

Every bit of the relationship instruction that we have given you applies to your relationship with every other believer in the world –

–of course, with the exceptions of:

Sex,

Levels of priority,

Levels of closeness between men and women outside of their union,

And, probably, the number of opportunities that you have to **strengthen** that person (Sometimes, confrontation has to take the back seat, unless it is urgent.[294] Scripture even tells that prayer alone will definitely work in this case[295]).

I remember when I first went to church after my revelation of trust with Kelsey.

I was so nervous.

294 1 John 5:16-17

295 1 John 5:14-15

For the first time, I had given my trust to someone, and now I had to ask myself:

> "Should I trust them, too?"

I will admit, at first my answer was "No."

> "I think that kind of trust is meant for marriage," I told Kelsey.

But the truth was that I had no Scripture to back that up, and I knew it.

You may have noticed that almost all of the Scriptures that we used in this book have nothing to do with a husband and wife—but with Christian brothers.

Kelsey had shown me that she was trustworthy, but I had to believe in faith for God's work in my brothers, who had shown me the opposite for many years.

Do you believe that God can "[make us] completely one, so the world may know [He] sent [Jesus]?"

> Is the Devil too clever? God is infinitely more so.
>
> Are men's hearts too hard? God has the power to soften them.
>
> Would God refuse to purify His children because it steals His glory? It would glorify Him.[296]
>
> Could the tares keep the wheat from living in unity? If they couldn't stop two wheats, then you can see that they really don't have the power to stop any.
>
> Does God use division in the Church to ac-

296 John 15:8

complish His purposes? He did it with Paul and Mark,[297] and He is doing it in the Church today.

But isn't every Bible teacher that you have sure to mention how Paul and Mark reconciled before they died?[298] Is that point important to your teachers despite it not applying to our lives? No! It's important because it does apply:

> "These things happened to them as examples, and they were written as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come."[299]

> Why then, do we teach that God reconciled Paul and Mark on Earth (after the work of their divided ministries was complete in God's eyes) and then, out of the other side of our mouths, teach that we will all be reconciled in Heaven?
>
> Could you imagine a Bible where Paul and Mark did not reconcile? It would feel incomplete.[300] It is not fitting for saints to be divided—but we are saints![301]

Wouldn't we have to be perfect in order to live in complete unity? No:

297 Acts 15:39

298 2 Timothy 4:11

299 1 Corinthians 10:11

300 Someone may argue that this story is only important to Bible teachers because Paul and Mark must agree to validate their message. I think that raises a good point about whether or not our own message is valid: How can people believe the Christian message today if we don't agree? But Bible teachers do not make this point for Bible credibility; they do it because they want to teach the Bible as it is, even if they do not fully understand how it applies to them. More than that, their audience would be disturbed to think that Paul and Mark never reconciled.

301 1 Corinthians 1:2 (addressed to a group which is shown to be very flawed in the rest of the letter)

For every true Christian, there only has to be **one person in each spiritual-family relationship that hasn't given up on first love.**

This is something that I experience with my wife now, and a process that can only be sustained by God.

Put your faith in action: If you believe that God can unify the Church, then you must believe that the believers in your life will love you.

The Church is not unified if you are not loved.

Your dream is great, whatever it is. Trust God with it!

Maybe you want a spouse. Maybe you want to open an outreach center. Maybe you want the gift of prophecy.

That's great!

Except, it's not great if you put your dream before God's dream.

There is no greater dream than the Church.

Do you want to change your government or your nation's culture?

That's great!

But it is not great if you put your dream above God's dream.

> Are the affairs of civilians really of that much concern to soldiers?[302]

302 2 Timothy 2:4

Do you want to reach the lost?

That's great!

How will they know that we are His disciples if we do not love one another?

Yes, "go unto the world,"[303] but our first responsibility is the Church:

> "Judgment must begin with God's House."[304]

If you, as important as you think that you are, "snatch someone from Hell" and then show no interest in them afterwards, can that be love? They're just another notch on your belt! Are you snatching people from their families to leave them as orphans? Are you making your Master's promise empty:

> "'I assure you,' Jesus said, 'there is no one who has left house, brothers or sisters, mother or father, children, or fields because of Me and the gospel, who will not receive 100 times more, now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and eternal life in the age to come.'"[305]

And, for all of the earthly things that you are praying for, you can hope for:

303 Matthew 28:19

304 1 Peter 4:17

305 Mark 10:29-30

Physical healing,

Financial breakthrough,

The ideal job,

A beautiful spouse,

And kids.

But what selfish thing is greater to have than a person that's happy to live and die for you?[306]

Someone with even just one friend like that is the richest person in the world. Most of us don't even hope for a spouse like that.

Is that too much for you to hope for?

If God answered every prayer that you ever prayed except for the ones that have to do with other people loving you, what kind of life would that be?

Honestly, I would rather just die now than live such an empty life, where my only hopes were inanimate, or my hopes were salvation for people that I have no real relationship with.

Hope for fiery love, from **each** of your brothers and sisters.

Eve & Jericho

"I assure you: If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for

306 Psalm 133; Also note that this Scripture speaks about unity as coming from God, like mountain dew.

in prayer."[307]

What caused the very first sin?

Wasn't it doubt in God's love:

> "Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?
>
> "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'
>
> "'No! You will not die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"[308]

And despite all of our sin, what is it that has caused God to forget all of it in a moment, and bless us?

Wasn't it faith in His love:

> "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did….
>
> "By faith Enoch was taken away so he did not

307 Matthew 21:21-22

308 Genesis 3:1-5

experience death, and he was not to be found because God took him away.…

"By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

"By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the One who had promised was faithful. Therefore from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as innumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore.

"These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth…

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and he was offering his unique son, the one it had been said about, 'Your seed will be traced through Isaac.' He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead, and as an illustration, he received

him back.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones.

"By faith, after Moses was born, he was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin. For he considered the reproach because of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward.

"By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees Him who is invisible. By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being encircled by the Israelites for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.

"And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,

> David, Samuel, and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength after being weak, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead—they were raised to life again. Some men were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection, and others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.
>
> "All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us."[309]

It is not the shouts that brought Jerico down or the praises that broke Paul and Silas out of prison.

It was God's response to their act of faith.

You will not sing your way into a miracle.

You cannot summon the presence of God.

The power to grow comes from "remaining" in the Vine,[310] not necessarily from prayer (although prayer is certainly the first half),[311] and John tells us what "remaining" means:

309 Hebrews 11:4-40

310 John 15:5-7

311 Matthew 26:41

"No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and **His love is perfected in us.**

"This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given assurance to us from His Spirit. And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son as the world's Savior. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him."[312]

"Little children, we must not love with word or speech, but with truth and **action**. This is how we will know we belong to the truth and will convince our conscience in His presence, even if our conscience condemns us, that God is greater than our conscience [This is true about all that we feel], and He knows all things.

"Dear friends, if our conscience doesn't condemn us, we have confidence before God and can receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight. Now this is His command: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He commanded us. **The one who keeps His commands remains in Him, and He in him.** And the way we know that He remains in us is from the Spirit He has given us."[313]

If you want a breakthrough in your heart or in your life, you have to ***act*** in faith (in God's love for you).

God did not send my wife to me until I decided to trust Him

312 1 John 4:12-16

313 1 John 3:18-24

in my heart for her, and stopped trying to find the wife that I was praying for in my own strength. Instead, I took the opportunities that God gave me.

A Woman of God

God did not send my husband to me until I decided to trust His way was better than anything I could have dreamed and stopped trying to build my own blessing. Instead, I surrendered to Him in hopeful obedience.

A Man of God

Would Eve have been cursed by asking God for wisdom, having faith in His love?

> Many have caused God to change His mind[314] (in a manner of speaking)[315] by asking in this way.
>
> And God has shown us in many ways that He wants us to have wisdom,[316] and to be made like Him,[317] the very things that Satan caused Eve to believe that God would withhold from her.

Do you want wisdom?

> "[You] should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.
>
> "But [ask] in faith without doubting [In other words, don't go ask your worldly friends what they think.].
>
> "For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

314 Exodus 32:9-14; 2 Kings 20:1-6; Matthew 5:21-28; among others

315 Numbers 23:19

316 Proverbs 4:7

317 Ephesians 5:1

> "[You] should not expect to receive anything from the Lord."[318]

Do you want money?

> You should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.
>
> Don't skip out on church to get overtime. Give money to your church.
>
> Or you should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Do you need sex?

Do you want a beautiful, godly, selfless, warm, and fun spouse? Only God can give you this.[319]

> You should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.
>
> > Don't sin by meeting your own sexual needs through masturbation or your girlfriend/boyfriend.
> >
> > Don't sin by being in a relationship with someone who does not already put God before everything, including you.
> >
> > Don't sin by playing games or pretending not to be interested[320] and pursuing people that are not straightforward with you.

318 James 1:5-7

319 Proverbs 14:14; Song of Solomon 2:2; Ecclesiastes 7:28

320 Matthew 7:12

> Don't sin by telling God anything other than that you believe He is going to do it.[321]

Or you should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Do you want the Church to be unified? Honestly, even if you don't believe that He can or will, don't you want it?

Only God can give you this.

> You should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.

> Trust your brothers and sisters.

> Ask every time when you are in need.

> Give the benefit of the doubt.

> Confront them.

> Draw a line when you need to.

> Never stop giving in love.

> Never stop trusting God for their heart.

And you ***can*** expect God to reward your faith with a miracle.

You can, **just because you want it,[322] because He loves you.**

But if these weren't enough, you have even more reasons to believe, though:

321 James 1:6

322 James 5:17; Romans 8:32

> If Jesus didn't believe that God would, then why would He pray it?

And in this, you have yet another assurance; He ends His instructions on confrontation with this:

> "I assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven."[323]

The "two" for you as you pray for complete unity in the Church is (1) Jesus, and (2) you, which should give you great confidence because Jesus said on Earth:

> "Do you think that I cannot call on My Father, and He will provide Me at once with more than twelve legions of angels?"[324]

> > Not to mention, Jesus has always been in complete unity with the Father's will.[325]

> "**God's purpose in [His plan from the beginning of time] was to use the Church to display his wisdom** in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord [by His death and Resurrection]…**"[326]

> "Now to Him who is ***able*** *to do above and* ***beyond all that we ask or think*** according to the power that works in us— to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

323 Matthew 18:19

324 Matthew 26:53

325 1 John 5:14-15; John 17:11; John 14:9-11

326 Ephesians 3:10-11 (NLT)

"**Therefore** I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us.**

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

"Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. For it says:

> "'When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people.'

"But what does 'He ascended' mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth? The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son,*** growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But ***speaking the truth in love***, **let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.** From Him **the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working**

of each individual part."[327]

"Commit your activities to the Lord, and your plans will be achieved."[328]

Right or Wrong, Faith is Right

So, what if God never does unify the Church?

Well, you are still commanded to do and believe all of the same things. Doing and believing these things is the only way to please God.

The three Hebrew boys believed that God would deliver them from the fire.

That is why they obeyed God under the threat of death.

But even if God did not answer their faith with a miracle, living as if He would was still the right thing to do.

This is how Jesus, Peter, and Paul lived.

If God would not have responded to their faith time and time again, then their righteous acts would have led straight to their deaths.

You also know that their faith and righteous acts did later also lead to their deaths.[329]

In the same way, your acts of faith may lead to disappointment, but they are indeed the only way to obey God.

327 Ephesians 3:20-4:16

328 Proverbs 16:3

329 Someone may argue that these men knew of their deaths, so they were not believing for an earthly miracle, and that person would be right. But God gave each of these men a special revelation that they would die—so their "righteous doubt" was an exception, not the rule. Still, they put their hope in Heaven. When Paul was uncertain about his death, he chose to believe that he would live. Matthew 26:24; 2 Peter 1:14; 2 Timothy 4:7; Philippians 1:21-26

Therefore, trust God for your brother by stepping out.

But.

If God is "is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think," and His plan is better than what we can imagine,[330]

Then there is a 100% chance that He will reward our faith with ***at least*** complete unity in the Church.

Not less.

And if you are imagining something less exciting than that, then you aren't having faith. And you're wrong.

Personally, I think—and Jesus[331] and Paul would agree—that presenting a unified Church to our Father on Judgement Day would be a lot more exciting than presenting a simply Blood-washed one.

> And it doesn't seem like a crazy idea to them![332]
>
> In fact, Jesus is confident that His Church will produce fruit.[333]

So, I believe that, by His righteousness, He will allow us to give a unified Church to Him, along with the crown which He has already promised us, by His righteousness.

Just as each of us who are granted the mercy to go on to produce fruit are more blessed than those who receive the mercy of Heaven alone,

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330 Ephesians 3:20

331 Acts 20:35

332 John 17:20-23; Romans 12:16a, 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12:25; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:1-3, 13; Philippians 2:1-2

333 Matthew 21:43-44; Daniel 2:45; Romans 8:38-39; Revelation 16:5-6; This fruit is unlike the failure of Israel. Jesus' work gives the Church the power to accomplish a final, true good work, which is His plan for the end of the world that began with His death and Resurrection.; Ephesians 3:10-11

> We can all expect our God, who rewards our faith according to its measure (always loving us as much as we allow Him to), to grant us the greater mercy of producing fruit for Him.[334]

Before the events of the New Testament, no one could have predicted that Jesus would die on the cross for our sins, that the Messiah would not immediately rule Israel, or that the Gentiles would have been welcomed into Abraham's family.

The Jews had very strong evidence to match their very different expectations of all that was fulfilled.

In fact, for this very reason, the Jews rejected Jesus. They had a hard time imagining that God would become a man, or that the Messiah would not be someone educated or born into a high class (even though He was the earthly heir to the throne).

The prophecies indicated that Jesus will be a ruler, and that Israel is His chosen people, which of course:

> He will, and they are.

In the same way, it is hard to imagine a future with a unified church when the prophecies also say that those who **claim** to be believers:

> "Difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people!
>
> "For among them are those who worm their way

334 Jude 1:24

> into households and capture idle women burdened down with sins, led along by a variety of passions, always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth, men who are corrupt in mind, worthless in regard to the faith. **But they will not make further progress, for their lack of understanding will be clear to all, as theirs was also….**
>
> "…Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived…
>
> "…For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths."[335]

Now, you should note that Paul says that these people will not be successful, and does not accept these people as absolute forces, but charges Timothy to fight against them, as Paul himself does:

> "Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching….
>
> "…For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."[336]

You can't foresee God's plan any more than the Jews could predict the events of Jesus' earthly life, no matter how well you think you know Scripture, or the puzzle pieces that God has

335 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 13, 4:3-4

336 2 Timothy 4:2, 6-7

revealed to you personally.[337]

Jesus' earthly life was more **impossible** than any miracle that has ever taken place. It did not just break the laws of Physics, it changed the Law of Heaven (though it is not changed, but fulfilled).

> "I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even **greater works** than these, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, **I will do it**."[338]

Is healing a man with your shadow or a piece of cloth greater than healing a man with your hands? Do you think that God thinks so?

There will never be a greater miracle than the cross and Resurrection of Jesus—I am not saying that.

But will you believe God for an Earth-miracle, like supernatural healing, but not for a Heaven-miracle, like a united Church? This miracle would only be one fulfillment of the Heaven-miracle of the Resurrection, and of God's promise:

> "I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."[339]

But even if that does not convince you:

> God's plan cannot be imagined until it is fulfilled, but what we do know is that He desires faith.

Do not Put Your Faith in Man

337 John 11:49-53

338 John 14:12-14

339 Ezekiel 36:26b

Some Christians like to say "Don't put your faith in man" as a way of saying that putting your trust in man will always lead to disappointment.

This quote comes from three places in scripture:

> "This is what the Lord says: The man who trusts in mankind, who makes human flesh his strength and turns his heart from the Lord is cursed."[340]

> "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in nobles."[341]

> "Do not trust in nobles, in man, who cannot save. When his breath leaves him, he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die."[342]

As you can see, these Scriptures are not saying to keep yourself from trusting human beings to love you.

They are saying not to put your trust in humans to protect you when you are rebelling against God—and by rebelling against God.

Instead, trust God to protect you from humans when you rebel against their sinful wishes:

> "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."[343]

"But Jesus didn't trust people," you might say:

> "Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to

340 Jeremiah 17:5

341 Psalm 118:8-9

342 Psalm 146:3-4

343 Matthew 10:28

> them, since He knew them all and because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man."[344]

That's completely right.

But Jesus did trust His disciples:

> "I do not call you slaves anymore, because a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father."

His next words are very telling:

> "You did not choose Me, but I chose you."

In other words, Jesus has complete confidence in them:

He chose them because He knew that, by His power, that they would fulfill the purpose of His calling, which is indicated by His next words:

> "**I appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain,** so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. **This is what I command you: Love one another**."[345]

If Jesus trusts His Chosen Ones to love one another, why shouldn't you trust that you will be loved by His Chosen Ones?

That seems pretty arrogant to me.

If that is not enough proof for you, also consider Jesus' reaction to Judas' kiss after being betrayed:

344 John 2:24-25

345 John 15:15-17

> "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"[346]

Jesus was hurt. Even knowing that Judas was going to betray Him, Jesus chose to trust Judas emotionally—handing His heart over to be broken.

> "Even my friend in whom I trusted, one who ate my bread, has raised his heel against me."[347]

In the same way, love requires that we give our Brothers the opportunity to hurt us, trusting that they will not. And if they do betray us, then it should hurt.

You are not God

Don't take any of what we are saying to mean that you can be the judge of every aspect of other Christians' lives and ministries.

There are certainly things that you can know about what is right and wrong for your brother and other churches to do.

But, in the end, they have to stand before God themselves.[348]

> If they want to obey God, sometimes they will have to do things that you just won't understand.
>
> And some sins will have to be revealed to them by someone other than you, or by no human at all.
>
> You will also stand before God. You cannot be blamed for another's sin, but you **can** be blamed for being silent **or** speaking up at the wrong times.

346 Luke 22:48

347 Psalm 41:9; John 13:18

348 Romans 14:10-12

The most that you can do in some cases is present a Scripture to your brother, and believe them if they say that they have applied it to their lives, which may be hard for you to see.

Even among my closest friends, there are things that they do which seem like sin, but I can't know. Those things could be their way of obeying God, which they seem to be convinced of.

There are a lot of churches that do questionable things, but at this distance from them I can only assume that they too are obeying God's commands.

Complete obedience for them may not look like complete obedience for you.

God's wisdom is too great to be expressed by your story alone. Jesus said:

> "I assure you: Among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared... To what should I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to each other:
>
> > "'We played the flute for you, but you didn't dance; we sang a lament, but you didn't mourn!'
>
> "For John did not come eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is [declared right] by her deeds."[349]

Jesus and John the Baptist lived very different lifestyles and had very different ministries, but both were wholly God-approved. Both brought people to faith, and both teach us things

349 Matthew 11:11, 16-19

that can be applied to our own lives.

In the same way, our minds are opened to God's wisdom and learn to be encouraged by His leadership in His People's hearts when we see our brothers building up the church with a different song than our own.

Some of our brothers are even being used in their sin—as all of us are, really.

The Gospel is spread, and their own spirits are growing, too—just maybe not in the same order which ours has grown:

> Maybe God taught you forgiveness, and then patience. But for your brother, He decides to teach him patience, and then forgiveness.

When we see this, our minds are comforted by God's wisdom over our own and learn to be encouraged by His leadership in His People's hearts.

14. Child-Like

"Then children were brought to Him so He might put His hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. Then Jesus said, 'Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because **the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this.**'"[350]

Naïve Beliefs

You may notice that a lot of the things that God has spoken to us seem very unrealistic, too good to be true, like a fairytale.

> "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God's power to us who are being saved."[351]

Yes, I really do believe that my sin is washed away, the moment that I believe and repent.

Yes, I really do believe that all of my problems and sadness will disappear, and I will be given riches and honor for eternity

350 Matthew 19:13-14

351 1 Corinthians 1:18

–For doing nothing.

Yes, I really do believe that faith is all that it takes to be welcomed into God's family, and to have real brothers.

–For doing nothing.

–Even if I haven't spent time with them, suffered with them, or given anything to them.

–Even if I have wounded them, no matter how badly.

Is that child-like of me?

Goofy Prayers

Yes, I really believe that God can save anyone.

Yes, I really believe that He will answer if I ask Him to, so I ask Him for all of them, by name!

My family.

Those who have hurt me.

People who are really vulgar.

My bosses.

People in the grocery store.

I believe it so much that I actually go to talk to these people about Jesus!

Yes, I really believe that God heals.

I believe it so much that I pray for people with illnesses and injuries that cannot be healed, in public.

Yes, I really believe that God will take care of me.

I believe it so much that I obey the Bible when it says to let people cheat me.[352]

Yes, I really believe that God has forgiven me.

I believe it so much that I even pray for Him to set me free from the earthly consequences of my own actions.

Yes, I really believe that God can put people back together who have been divorced.

Yes, I really believe that God can turn a woman's rapist into her brother.[353]

Yes, I really believe that God can put back churches that have split.

Yes, I really believe that God can dissolve denominations.

I believe it so much that I ask my brothers and sisters to be unified when I see that they are not.

352 Matthew 5:38-48

353 Again, men and women who do not intend to be married to each other should avoid texting or meeting alone anyway. Even those who are dating should show that they do not trust themselves. Those who show no respect for this principle should not be trusted, even if they are virgins. Rapists should show the same accountability, plus make a point to be transparent about their past to the whole church. This is not for shame or payment, but for his own safety and love for his brothers. And he should be patient with the mistreatment of those who do not forgive him, knowing that he is innocent. He should not be welcomed back if he shows anything less than such miraculous accountability. It is impossible to find any man that will pass this test, so if a man does, then it must be God's work.

Is that child-like of me?

Certainly, all of my words to these people do no good. In fact, sometimes it does harm—people are offended, and wounded, and stumble over the Rock into their sin![354]

All I am doing is giving God the chance to do a miracle.

If someone, unsaved or walking in the Flesh, reacts badly to your call to repentance, it's not because you did the wrong thing.[355]

> You are accountable for when and how you speak, but they are accountable to listen—You are not disqualified from speaking up just because you have sinned.
>
> I say this with the assumption that you would never carelessly or intentionally sin.
>
> If they are waiting on a perfect person to deliver the truth to them, then they will hear it for the first time at their Judgement.
>
> Even if your behavior is perfect to them, which it can be, then they will find fault in you just as they found fault in the spotless Lamb of God.

Now, of all of the hopes that I just listed, I have yet to see the ones which I desire most:

354 Romans 9:32-33; 2 Corinthians 2:16

355 John 7:7b, 15:18-21

Not my welcome into Heaven.

Not one brother that I have not had to win over.

Not one person who I have prayed for or witnessed to truly turning to Jesus, to my knowledge.

Not one sickness, ailment, or even trauma healed.

The feelings of guilt[356] and haunting memories of my past sins have yet to be erased.

Not one broken relationship restored, even for myself.

Now I have many brothers who have seen these miracles in their own lives, but I believe that God has delayed blessing me with these things for this reason:

As a sign to you, reader, of what faith means:

Worldly wisdom is experience: As we get older, we learn what is impossible (without God).

Worldly wisdom is good, but heavenly wisdom is better.

Worldly wisdom has not one ounce of saving power.

Heavenly wisdom is faith: the ability to see the love of God for those who believe in any situation, no matter how dark.

The pain of these things which I still lack is the very assurance that God will give them to me[357] because of His love for me. If it will be done for

356 1 John 3:20

357 Hebrews 11:1; Matthew 5:3-11 (Heaven being the ultimate fulfillment of this principle which God also fulfills on Earth for many people who have faith.)

me according to my faith,[358] then I can't afford to believe for less.

Even Abraham, our example: the father of our faith, became our father and example by trusting God to fulfill his selfish desires.

So, like Paul, I let God do the supernatural work, and I speak God's truth.[359]

Like Elijah, I test God with love which requires faith and faith which requires love[360] (rather than testing Him with sin or irresponsibility[361]).

I pour water on my altar. And each day that fire does not fall, I pour even more.

And I know that the fire will lick up even the stones.[362]

If there is honey in the rock,[363] then why are you only asking for water—and complaining as if God won't even give you that?

Are you Lazarus' sister, Mary, driving Jesus to tears of heartbroken frustration?[364]

358 Matthew 9:29

359 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

360 Malachi 3:10

361 Luke 4:9-12; Hebrews 10:26-27

362 1 Kings 18:20-38

363 Psalm 81:16

364 John 11:17-40; Pay attention to what Jesus is trying to get Mary and Martha to see, what breaks Him into tears, and that He is angry.

Are your eyes on the waves?

> Or are your eyes on your own feet, standing on the waves?
>
> If not your own feet, then the feet of anyone else that you know that has seen God answer their prayers? What about my story or the stories in the Bible? Do you believe your brothers' stories or not?
>
> A stiff-necked person is not a stubbornly sinful person. Their feet may be pointed in the right direction: They may be outwardly doing the good things which people of faith do!
>
> But their neck is crooked: They are stuck looking backwards at the things which point to **hopelessness for themselves,**[365] just as the Israelites "saw" how long Moses was on the mountain, rather than "looking at" the many miracles.
>
> They are willing to be thrown into the fire, but don't expect God to save them.[366]
>
> Inevitably, their feet follow to faithless actions: They build golden calves and worship them. They sacrifice their lives with resentful hearts[367] or cower at the last second. They do every kind of evil.

From experience, I can tell you that seeing a miracle will not take away your feelings of doubt,[368] just as it did not for Elijah.[369] Faith is a choice, whether you have seen a miracle or

365 Nehemiah 9:17; Acts 7:51 ("uncircumcised heart and ears"); Genesis 19:26; Luke 9:62

366 Daniel 3:17

367 Matthew 7:22; Luke 15:29

368 Luke 16:31

369 1 Kings 18-19

not.[370]

Doubt will always be easier and seem more rational. **Your faith will never be easy when it counts—which is why we are told that we can't grow our faith, but to hold onto our mustard seed.[371] We avoid doubting as Job doubted,[372] when it was difficult for him to have faith** (maybe you relate more to Job than Elijah).

Job had a reason to **have faith in God's love, which is the same thing as having hope for himself[373] (and so do you):**

> Job could not understand God's plan,[374] no matter what evidence Job saw that said God does not care for him.
>
> Job could not have known that God would bless him as much as He did at the end of Job's life, but Job could have trusted God for better than what he could imagine—something more than worth his pain.
>
> This is the faith that Abraham showed. He imagined that Issaac would be brought from the dead—which was wrong—but Abraham was rewarded for putting his faith in the best that he could imagine.[375]

I could have found faith in my brothers' and sisters' testimonies—or Jesus's very promise to answer my prayers—but I looked at the things which I feared: the cloudless skies in my

370 John 20:29

371 Luke 17:5-6

372 Job 42:3, 6

373 The book of Job discusses the question of God's justice, and establishes that Job is blameless (Job 1:1, 8). Justice for blameless people from God is love, which is endless blessings, as the work of Christ bought for them. Jesus directly challenges us: Will He find any of us persevering to hold onto faith in this (Luke 18_7-8)?

374 Job 32-42

375 Hebrews 11:17-19

drought[376] and the testimonies of the majority, who spoke of marriage (my plea to God) as doom:

> "You want it now, but just wait."
>
> "You're excited now, but just wait."
>
> "Yeah, the grapes are huge, but wait until you see those giants." [377]

Faith is your choice. You have a choice to see the giants or to see the grapes.

> "Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"[378]

Pushy Dependency

Surely, God was able to defeat Jacob by just breathing on Him. But God, as a sign to us, wrestled with Jacob all night to test Jacob's faith.

He lost the fight with God, but Jacob won the test: Jacob did not let go until God blessed Him, even after having his hip

376 2 Kings 3:16-19

377 Numbers 13:17-14:36

378 Matthew 7:7-11

injured.[379]

This is the same faith that the Gentile mother showed Jesus. To unveil her faith, Jesus did not agree to heal her daughter at first. In fact, He ignores her for a while until He finally says:

> "Should I give the dogs bread from the children's table?"[380]

She responded:

> "But even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table."[381]

Because of the faith that she showed in her response, Jesus replied with tender words, praised her, and healed her daughter.

Now, if a person treated you as Jacob and the Gentile woman treated God, would you call them "faithful," or would you call them "needy?"

Children are the biggest trial to some people for many reasons. But to many, what weighs parents the most is the never-ending demand of their children. The very thing that God craves is what burdens them.

If you loved like God, what could people have faith to know that you would be happy to give them? Are they allowed to ask?

If someone is scared to ask you for anything, then that means that they either don't know Jesus very well, or they don't think that you are very much like Jesus.

379 Genesis 32:24-32

380 Matthew 15:26

381 Matthew 15:27

Also, are you child-like?

Or are you an independent person? A "real adult?"

Independence, as the world defines it, is not a value found in the Bible.

Instead, (1) wholehearted contribution, (2) dependence on God, and (3) dependence on believers are found:

1. "When we were with you, this is what we commanded you: 'If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat.' For we hear that there are some among you who walk irresponsibly, not working at all, but interfering with the work of others. Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ that quietly working, they may eat their own food. Brothers, do not grow weary in doing good."[382] This contribution is different from independence because it is implied that believers are sharing their wealth with other believers who are working.

2. "This is why I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not

382 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13

even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't He do much more for you—you of little faith? So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."[383]

3. "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ," and "There was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold."[384]

Independence is something that people value in you because they don't want to have to put you before themselves.

Independence a lie and a trap.

It is a lie to those who think that they are independent because God sustains them, even despite their faithless actions, and it is on the backs of others.

It is a trap to those who have independence[385] and to those who chase it. The reward of their faithless actions leads them to believe that they are the Vine.

383 Matthew 6:25-34

384 Galatians 6:2; Acts 4:34

385 Psalm 69:22; Romans 11:9

To protect my first love with God, I have to pray about everything,[386] and boldly approach His throne.[387]

In the same way, I protect my first love for my wife by being quick to bring all of my needs to her, even if she is, at that moment,

Unable to fulfill them as I pictured at first,

Or only able to offer:

1. Compassion for what she wishes she can do and

2. Optimistic faith that she will be able to do it one day:

- Both of which I must trust in.

- And I need to have gratitude[388] for what God has allowed her to give me in the present.

She does the same.

A Woman of God

I protect my first love for my husband by being quick to bring all of my needs to him, no matter how grand or small they may seem.

I silence the noise that tells me I am being high maintenance or ridiculous.

And his response of compassion and faith confirms my decision to trust him with anything my heart wants and more.

386 Philippians 4:6

387 Hebrews 4:16

388 Hebrews 13:5

And to protect my first love for my brothers, I do the same.

Innocence

I have one more sin to confess to you.

And I will end on this because I want to leave you with a picture of what God is reconciling us to each other for.

I was ashamed of being a virgin, until Kelsey changed my mind.

She respected my purity; she was intimidated by it.

I seemed to be a strong man on the outside because of a few outward works of sexual purity. But it was actually God who saved those things for my wife.

I was a cowardly boy on the inside:

> For those many years that I was ashamed, I used the internet to learn about what it took to please a woman sexually, among many other things.
>
> I was technically innocent of laying my eyes on a woman, but I was not innocent of the knowledge of women.
>
> I did this because having the knowledge made me feel bigger.
>
> Because I was a virgin, I was made to feel small by other men, even by other Christians, who took pride in their sinful sexual past.
>
> Working to be respected by men, I gave up God's

respect, the respect of my wife, and all godly people.

Working to please women, I was in their beds.

I can't be in bed with my wife while in my head being in bed with other women—that is unacceptable!

I could not please them and please my wife.

I've had to forget the opinions of every man and woman to please her in bed.

I cannot fulfill their expectations and hers.

I choose hers.

> Not one word of what I was told that it takes to please a woman has been true.
>
> Really, I like our version of sex a lot better than what other people brag about. Even the best of it sounds like misery to me now.
>
> If God had not restored my innocence, **then my knowledge would have taken most of the fun out of sex.**

A Woman of God

If God had not restored my innocence, then my knowledge would have robbed me of experiencing sex as a holy gift from God to my marriage.

A Man of God

Our experience in marriage has taught us why purity is so important:

Sex is very important to us.

We want to enjoy it, continue to desire it, be excited about it, do it often, and feel connected to each other emotionally.

So, we do not want any part of sex to belong to anyone other than one another.

And we do not want any part of sex to belong to anyone other than God.

Learning this has caused us to make a lot of changes in our lives over time. Things that we enjoyed doing before, we have stopped—and sometimes it has cost us greatly.

A few times, protecting our purity has felt like giving up parts of our own identities, basic freedoms, and even the values of our relationship (which did not always turn out to align with God's word as we told ourselves).

Often, it makes us feel isolated because we do not participate in things that everyone else does.

Sometimes it feels like a lot to ask each other for.

But no matter how hard it feels, it always ends up being an easy decision to make because of how much we value our relationship.

And what an encouragement it is to see my identity being traded for Christ's!

How much greater freedom is it to live under my

> Father's roof and have free access to His wallet—
> than to take what He has given me so far and go
> run the roads with it.

Kelsey's and my relationship with each other is very important to us.

So, we don't want any part of our lives to belong to anyone but God.

Our relationship with people, believers or not, is very important to us.

So, we don't want any part of our speech to belong to anyone but God.

> "Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not
> suitable, but rather giving thanks."[389]

I have often worried about seeming boring to people.

Worrying about this has caused me to compromise in the way that I talk:

> I got as close to the "line" that I could with my
> jokes, without sinning (or so I thought).

Children don't have to be a little bad to have fun.

They don't have to drink, make sexual jokes, complain, or put people down.

Why do we?

The truth is that we don't!

A boldly dirty person is fun to sinners.

389 Ephesians 5:4

A boldly pure person is fun to God's children, if they choose to be His children.

A Christian that is ashamed of innocence is fun to nobody.

A Christian should have a sense of humor,[390] but they shouldn't need to use humor as a crutch.

In fact, they shouldn't use anything as a crutch in conversation, whether those things are good or bad:

> Not work, sports, shows, movies, or hobbies.
>
> Not that these are wrong to talk about, but you should not need to have these things in common with someone in order to be able to talk with them.[391]

Thankfulness should be more than enough of a foundation for any enjoyable conversation.

But you have to commit to it with boldness and trust, forgetting the lie of shame:

> **If you only avoid what you can't talk about, instead of talking about what you enjoy, then you will be bored, and boring.**

And Jesus should be more than enough of a foundation for all of your relationships, with believers and nonbelievers.

> "The wicked flee when no one pursues them, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."[392]

The Gospel is true, or it is not. Moments when I am pres-

390 Proverbs 31:25

391 Romans 12:16b

392 Proverbs 28:1

sured to be shy because others live as if it is not true or relevant, I choose to remember that it is true—and this strengthens me not to be ashamed of it.[393]

I choose to walk like I am approved and blessings are coming my way, whether others shame me for:

My innocence,

My past guilt (even for my sins against those who refuse to forgive me, though I will apologize as many times as it takes if it will bring us together, yet I will not and cannot earn their love back),

Or my ignorance to the sin which has yet to be revealed to me.

Boldness is not just for the Gospel; it is for innocence:

"Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."[394]

I will not be ashamed of the things that:

I do and don't do,

I have and don't have,

I like and don't like,

Because of my relationship with God.

I also won't be ashamed of my style, skin color, and weird things that I enjoy.

Because I am adored by God for these things, and I want to give others the opportunity to be close to me.

393 Romans 1:16

394 Matthew 5:16

A real man is **boldly a child**:

Boldly submitted to all others.[395]

Boldly affectionate.[396]

Boldly vulnerable, taking the pain of betrayal like a man instead of avoiding it.

Boldly accountable.

Boldly questioning (trusting others to be accountable).

Boldly truth-speaking.

Boldly faith-filled.

Boldly dependent.

Boldly innocent.[397]

Stop and think about how a child is each of these things.

That is what you are called to be.

A Woman of God

And a real woman is the same: Boldly a child.

Boldly submitted to all others.

Boldly affectionate, gentle, and warm.[398]

395 Matthew 18:1-4

396 Mark 10:16a; Luke 19:41-44, 22:15; Romans 16:16

397 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 John 2:1 ("little children")

398 Philippians 4:5

Boldly vulnerable and humble (not striving to maintain an image of perfection)[399]

Boldly accountable (being comfortable not having "control").[400]

Boldly questioning (trusting others to be accountable).

Boldly truth-speaking.[401]

Boldly faith-filled.[402]

Boldly dependent.[403]

Boldly innocent.

399 1 Peter 5:5

400 James 3:17

401 Proverbs 31:26

402 Proverbs 14:1

403 Ephesians 5:22

Closing

A Man of God

It may seem to you that this is my book, and not my wife's.

But the truth is that what I've written is only me putting into words the way that I have seen her put love into action (Yes, her faith in God working in me is love!).

It took me over a decade to learn what God taught her in about two years of following God.

And even then, I would not have learned it if she had not taught me.

We are fully aware that many will read this book and make fun of us for our child-like beliefs and for our sins.

Some will call us liars, deluded, or naive for telling about the miracle that we experienced on our wedding night, which was proof of the Resurrection of Jesus —shown by the supernatural power and because of what the miracle symbolized.

But we speak the truth because it is the truth. Otherwise, we would be liars.

And it is all a small cost to us for the reward of freedom that our brothers and sisters will find for themselves in these pages.

> "But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of

God's grace."[404]

We may be persecuted here, even by our own brothers for a time, as Paul was,[405] but we will be honored in Heaven.

> Just as David is honored in Heaven by God and on earth by Heaven's citizens, though his reputation was, understandably, rot to many on Earth during his lifetime.[406]

We hope that you will follow our example in humility, for the sake of truth and for your brothers' freedom.

> "The goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some have deviated from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion."[407]

Even though we have done our best to make what God has revealed to us clear and to show how it comes from God's Word (in context)[408] and from His very heart, we know that not everyone who reads may understand. And many of our brothers may not agree, at first.

> "All who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained."[409]

There is much more that we have to say about all of these things, and we hope that we get the opportunity. But otherwise, we know that God will speak them to your heart Himself, as He has to some already, without our help. In fact, those

404 Acts 20:24

405 Phillipians 1:15-17; 2 Timothy 4:14-16

406 1 Samuel 11

407 1 Timothy 1:5-6

408 Matthew 4:1-11

409 Philippians 4:15-16

"dreamers"[410] would have been a help to us if we had listened to them while on our mad course.[411] Instead, we scoffed at them, and learned the hard way.

Know that you are warmly treasured and passionately loved, by God and by us.[412]

Pray for us.

We look forward to spending eternity with you.

May the beauty of God's mercy –

And the beauty of His expert hands at work in your heart be with you.

May complete unity with God and His people,[413]

And the peace[414] that comes with that peace[415] be with you.

410 Genesis 37:19-21

411 2 Peter 2:15-16

412 John 13:34

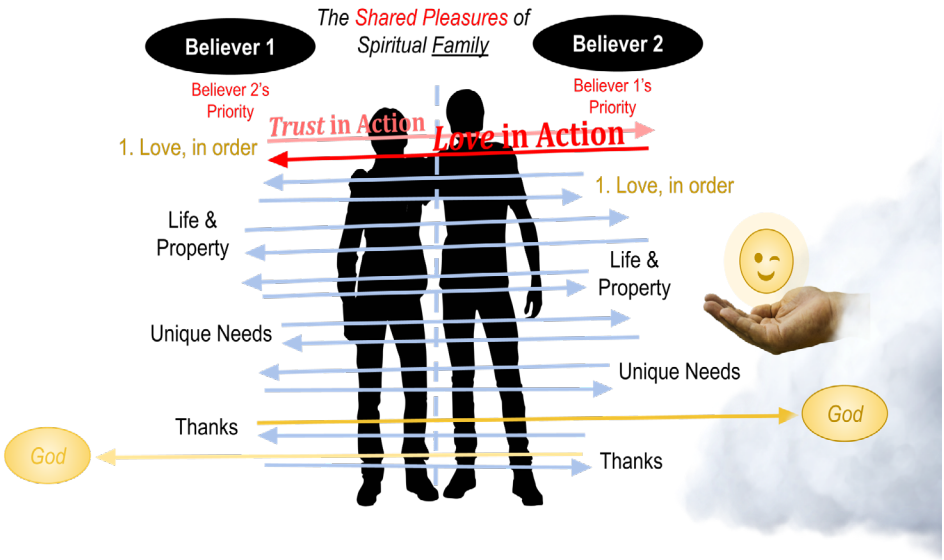
413 Romans 12:16a, 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12:25; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:1-3, 13; Philippians 2:1-2; Hebrews 12:14-16; James 3:17-18; 1 Peter 3:8-9, 11

414 Inner peace: John 14:27; Philippians 4:7; among others

415 Fiery, intimate peace between people: Romans 12:18, 14:19; Galatians 5:13-6:2; Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 3:12-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; among others

Addendum

Love Matrix



The #1 thing that anyone else needs from us is for us to love them in order. It's best for my kids that I put my wife before them, and it's best for my wife that I put God before her.

We should put other people's lives before our own. Like God, we freely give without limit, not just by sparing them from

harm, but by being joyful to meet all of their petty wants if they are within our power. We freely give our property and acknowledge the right of property to others, allowing them to give freely and not by guilt or force taking what belongs to them (like a husband's body belongs to a wife –although this one should not be shared).

We all have unique needs in a relationship—like a husband needs sex from his wife, and not his brother. A son needs discipline from his father, and not his sister. Some of us have unique needs because of who we are as individuals—perhaps one of your brothers needs to be hugged to feel loved, whereas the other brother might crave a different expression of love. Someone with a disability, or someone who is in mourning would have special needs that need to be met by their brothers in order for love to be complete.

We glorify God by acknowledging the good work that He has done in one another—by giving honor. However, this is not a need that humans can fulfill. God will glorify us. We cannot ever demand thankfulness from our brothers for ourselves, or else we are serving them to gain points.

I've Been There/No Excuses

I wrote these poems in the hard season of my life, which was my whole life until the two weeks before I met Kelsey.

I will help you to see where I went wrong in my suffering.

Poem #1: "Eroded"

Freezing wind beats against my body
All day and night
Drying my lips
Blinding my eyes
Cracking my hands
Until they bleed

His words are like boulders
Stacking on top of my back
Then her spurn kicks me in the back of my knees
Knocking me to the ground

My heart rots in darkness
My mind mushs in loneliness
My spirit goes sour in emptiness
My strength wears in hopelessness

I'm told that I'm worth a fortune
But I've been appraised for nothing
At night my arms ache
For someone to hold

Allergic and addicted to love
Born like a crack baby
Never touched a woman
But always in withdrawals

Flames of guilt crawl up my skin at low tide
Then comes lust
Often quick as lightning
Often imminent as a tsunami
Always thick as honey, and tar, and blood

Often slow like ants
Crawling all over me and biting
Or like rats
Knitting madness in my chest
For hours

Or like octopi
Swimming in my head
Whipping my brain like cream
Slipping through my fingers as I grasp at them
And grasp at the water

Trying to swim to a place for my head to rest

§

Stanzas 1 & 3 are about life wearing on me.

The man in Stanza 2 is a mixture of different men throughout my life. The Brothers in my life at the time that I wrote this were stacking back onto me criticisms that I received as a child, making it feel impossible to succeed. They helped me to keep a record of my wrongs, and I did not see myself as new when I repented, so I had nothing to fight the weight of their words with.

The woman in Stanza 2 is a mixture of different women throughout my life. The Sisters in my life at the time seemed disinterested in me, just as I was spurned by girls and women throughout my childhood. It made the weight of the men's criticisms even more unbearable.

The reality is that I only chose to see when I was being rejected by a girl (because it hurt so badly, and I wanted to avoid it), and I ignored the ones that told me "that I'm worth a fortune," as I said in Stanza 4—I was "allergic" to them (Stanza 5), meaning that their love was out of reach for me because I did not like them.

Of course I was "appraised for nothing," because I only went for relationships that other people seemed to think would not work out—because I wanted to prove myself to those people, and to myself.

It played tricks on my mind—where girls who were more available actually seemed uglier to me. And if the same girl became unavailable, then she would seem to be covetously pretty. It took more than a decade for me to notice this.

(Because of this, I learned that any woman can be the most beautiful if she is beautiful at all, so I learned to ignore features that bugged me at first when trying to date someone—until I decide to marry her and my mind can be opened).

I was given a deep desire for marriage (both sex and romance) from God Himself, as shown by Stanzas 4 and 5. It was a very, very large burden to bear, but it was a gift. My sin was not trusting God for it and putting it above Him, my Sisters, and my wife.

"Flames of guilt crawl up my skin at low tide" means that I woke up every morning feeling guilty for masturbating the night before, and then carried that guilt all day, every day—

–That is, except for when I was being tempted to masturbate again. The temptation always came back. It was a fact that it was far easier for me to masturbate every night than it was not to.

> It was not porn or drugs—I could not take the temptation away by throwing my phone into the garbage or flushing pills down the toilet. I was trapped in bed every night with myself, unable to sleep.
>
> I could stay up for hours praying or doing anything else to try and avoid it, but my body kept me up for hours more until I would masturbate. Sometimes I would just not sleep, but then the next night I was even more tired, and the temptation was even harder to fight.
>
> Confession, and even leaving my bedroom door open did not take the temptation away.
>
> If I was fighting well against temptation, my body would try even harder. Often I would wake up, and I was already masturbating. It was very hard to stop at that point. Often I would have dreams and even hallucinations (these are the "octopi" whisking my brain) that would distract me from what I was doing, but at some point I was always released from the dream and presented with the choice to

stop.

If you are trying to think of a solution for me to have avoided temptation—there wasn't one. Trust me, I have definitely already thought of whatever ideas that you have, with the willingness even to castrate myself—but the obligation to obey God, who I knew desired for me to be married.

The only solution was to say "No," again, and again, and again, and again. As many times as I was tempted, for hours, nights, weeks, and decades.

That is not to say that I never masturbated willingly or happily. It was always a willing choice, and sometimes I was very happy to do it.

Despite how hard it was, it remains a fact that what I did was unspeakably evil, and I did have a choice. My wife does not care how hard it was—I gave my heart and penis to other women (let's call it for what it is). Even if I would not have lusted, then I gave my heart and penis to myself, when they belong to her alone. I took something from my wife that I could not give back to her.

Thank God that my redemption is in Jesus, and not in the pieces of "virginity" that I saved for her.

Also, yes, I am pro-fast and pro-early marriage (if you are going to marry at all), despite what people think is wise today. I agree with the Bible:

"Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples: 'The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore do whatever they tell

> you, and observe it. But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach. **They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them.**"[416]
>
> "The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs…. It is better to marry than to burn with desire."[417]

It is a sin to have your sexual needs met in any way outside of a spouse.

It makes sense that people are cautious because of divorce today, but being slow to commit is part of the problem, not the solution. It is very common for people who wait in caution to get divorced just like anyone else.

All things are possible with God's help and His wisdom through His Body—including helping you select and keep a spouse (although "keeping" is not a righteous goal, but first love). The Body should be happy to bear your burdens, rather than giving you advice that requires less help from them.

It is selfish to want to live a full life before meeting your spouse, and bad preparation for a lifestyle of putting them before yourself. If you can wait that long, then you shouldn't get married anyway, according to the Bible.[418] Your life is not your own to build as you please.

It's cruel and unbiblical to advise someone to not have sex while burning with desire for years when God presents an alternative. No one's wisdom is smarter than God's Word.

Don't think someone is ready for marriage? Who says that you are? None of us are. But if you are really concerned, then help

416 Matthew 23:1-4

417 1 Corinthians 7:3 (NLT), 9b

418 1 Corinthians 7:8-9

them! Don't just push it off and judge from a distance by looking at nothing other than how fast they are going.

We leave addicts and prostitutes to be parents (and trust God's work in the child's life, whether we have a choice or not), so why can't we put a little faith in God's hand over Christians who want to obey God by (you) trusting them with a spouse?

Poem #2: "Old Friends

Plant your roots in my heart
I'll give you life
And you'll hold me together
Pull your roots out
And take my heart with you
I'll rake my soil back together
By the time the next friend comes

§

Friends leaving my life hurt, and it was right for it to hurt. It meant that I really loved them.

It is also right for me to open my heart to new friends, and leave myself vulnerable to being hurt by them.

It is good to want to be close with people; it's God's very heart. Just because something hurts doesn't mean that it is wrong.

Poem #3: "City Lights"

I'm so tired of people moving to the city
Our hearts grow together,
Then they forget me
They make empty every memory

§

It is true that God separates friends, whether the distance is a result of sin or of godly obedience. It is also true that with distance, in miles or in heart, pursuing closeness with those who you are distant from should become **less of a priority.**

I accept that there are some people that I may never talk to again, although I would really like to, and I pray for them

when they cross my mind.

However, if there is opportunity, talking should **still be a priority—**because there cannot be love without priority.

You cannot give up on a friendship becoming all that it had the potential to be, even if it only has the potential to be small. "Hello" matters to Christ.[419]

It's true that memories are not made empty just because of time and distance, but they are made empty when you give up, in your heart, on growing the relationship as far as it can go.

Sometimes you're trusting God to be made one with someone who is indifferent to you, instead of just people who mistreat you. Indifference hurts just as much, unless you let your own heart grow cold too.

Poem # 4: "Won Over"

I know you think I'm like my friends
That I can be won over

You can give them a reason
But you won't get them without a feeling
Oh the butterflies
Everybody needs them

I think all the time
About changing my mind
But I can't listen to the feeling
I need to find a reason

You can't change my mind
You could've changed and not lied
Or maybe I'm wrong
Or maybe it's my pride

§

419 Matthew 5:47

I did not realize it at the time, but this poem is about me being defensive towards girls that liked me and treated me well.

First of all, feelings are not always deceptive (I certainly did feel a lot of excitement for Kelsey, and I still do). I thought that I was being logical by judging them by their past sins and mistakes that—maybe I should have confronted them for, instead of building a case against them. I did not see them as pure, as Christ saw them and as they truly were.

There was no reason that would have won me over because I would have found another reason to hold them at a distance.

To be clear, it was wrong for me to "think all the time about changing my mind." Pursue marriage with someone or forget about them. Granted, there would have been no weight if I didn't have to forget at all: If I would have judged with God's standards and (possibly) received His provision.

As you can see in the last Stanza, my spirit was aware that I was wrong, even though I was not fully aware at the time:

> Even in this private poem that I never planned
> on showing anyone, it felt wrong to make a solid
> accusation.
>
> I was holier than them, so I thought. It was safer
> for me to look at them as evil than to trust any one
> of them as good, and then get hurt.

Only God knows what "lies" I was talking about—honestly it could have been anything. It felt safer for me to accuse people of lying than to trust them, and get hurt.

Although this was evil of me to do, God used it to save me for my wife. I wouldn't have it any other way. I feel no loss for the opportunities that I missed, but have gained something even better from God. If I would have known that Kelsey existed, then I would have waited my whole life for her. But who is to

say that my faith would not have woken her up from her sin and brought her into my life earlier?

After all, her faith may have been the hidden force which caused me to finally trust God for a wife, two weeks before we started talking, as she stepped out in faith at that very same time.

Poem #5: "Lonely is Better than Lonesome"

I may need it
But I don't want you
It's your fault
But it's everyone else's too

It's my fault too
I've given strangers my heart

What's the point of trying anymore

Don't stand with me
Don't lay with me
Don't call yourself my family

I can't want someone anymore
Not you
If only the silence would stop talking to me
Too

§

This poem was about my fear of being neglected in a relationship. I "needed" sex badly, but I did not trust any woman to fulfill my needs of love or sex.

Instead, I expected that my future wife would get bored with me and neglect me for attention and sex after the Honeymoon Phase wore off, if she ever even liked me at all.

"I don't want you." Wow. This was just mean. It was not the love of Christ. I felt powerful and respectable by rejecting peo-

ple, especially women.

"Fault": There's another "points-word" for you.[420] For me to be concerned with who's "fault" it was at all was is proof that I had not forgiven—not the people that I wrote this poem about, not the people that scared me in the first place, and not myself. The fact that I cared about whose fault it was is proof that I did not trust God to restore and exceed what was lost.

The "strangers" that I gave my heart to were Brothers. I was not wrong to give them my heart, but I regretted it at the time of writing this poem. I was scared to put my heart into another friendship.

Overall, I thought that I would prefer being lonely over missing someone, or being lonely within a marriage where my wife did not think of me.

"Don't call yourself my family" was my way of saying that no one has the right to call themself my Brother or wife because of how they have treated me. I was bitter.

The "silence talking" was loneliness. I wanted to kill myself because I felt trapped:

Lonesome if I gave my heart to someone, which I was refusing to do.

Lonely if I continued to be alone. Thank God for His design, which draws us to people.

Poem #6: "Fantasy"

There's no fantasy like a love song
I just want to write one that's real

As many times as I've fallen
I've found that I was the only one

420 John 9:1-7

Is love really love
If they don't feel the same
I'm not in love
If to you it's just a game

Lo
L-O
Lo is how you spell love that's incomplete
Low is how your heart sags with your cheeks

When will the part come
When I cry wolf
And no one believes me
The part when I'm all alone
And she comes to meet me

§

I didn't believe that a woman could really love a man, especially me.

Every girl that I ever pursued rejected me, and this poem was me being sad about that. Being in a relationship seemed completely unattainable.

Hopefully you understand by now that it was my fault.

You can see in Stanza 5 that I was trying to prove myself, which is exactly why I kept getting rejected. I did not recognize this at the time that I wrote this.

It was certainly not very loving for me to reject my Sisters because they weren't impressive enough to others. It was certainly not very loving of me to pursue my other Sisters just so I can use them to prove myself.

Poem #7: "No One to Share"

When I breathe in the Fall air,
The beauty turns to vanity in my chest

—Who can I share the colors with?

Why have a house
With no one to eat with
No one to curl in my sheets
No one to sing in my shower
No one to share a morning

What good is my body, my youth
My charm and my love
When I have no one to
Shelter in my heart

A sunset,
A beach,
Ice cream,
But most of all the Fall air

Why do I need anything good if I don't have someone to share it with?

§

God gave me a good desire to be married. Sex was also a good desire, but it wasn't the only desire that I had.

It is really wonderful to have these things now, and I refuse to take it for granted.

Poem #8: "Evil"

The older I get
The more broken I get
The more evil
I thought that I was supposed to get better

The older I get
The worse off are those around me
The more evil
I thought that things were supposed to get better
I'm sorry God

I think I've been defeated
Or I learned my true nature

I want to get better
God please save me
I can't do it on my own
I thought I had the will
It seems like I do
But I don't know
I'm not sure

§

I expected that as I continued to follow God that I would become a better person, that He would restore relationships with people who were not loving me or not loving Him, and that He would answer my prayers (for myself and others).

I saw none of this in my life for a very, very long time.

Instead, it seemed like I was becoming less and less like Jesus. People in my life were only getting farther and farther from me and from God, and tragedies continued to fall on them. Tragedies continued to fall on me, and the possibility of getting married only seemed to get more and more slim.

The truth is that I was not getting worse, but the true nature of my Flesh was showing. My Spirit was still growing—because God knew exactly what needed to be done to make me more like Him.

As you can see in the last Stanza, I had no idea what to do, and my understanding of my New Man was not fully formed. Thank God that I called on Him.

Poem #9: "Not my Friend"

I'll be your friend
But don't say you're mine

You don't care about my feelings, my pain

You don't care about what I want
You don't care about what I have to say

You want me for my ears
My sweat
My name

You want me for my body
And shame me for not wanting yours

You're never here
But somehow I always have you
There's another you to take your place
When you're gone

You are something
But you are not my friend

I don't think I'll ever
Find a friend

§

This poem shows the relationship that I tried to make with my friends without trust, and it shows how I judged whatever I could to keep myself from trusting girls that treated me well.

In Stanza 1, you can see that I wanted to be a giver in friendships but not to receive anything. Although it's obvious now reading this, it was not obvious to me then that I was bitter. I thought that forgiveness only took a commitment to give, not to trust.

> Also, I gave up hope on being loved by God's people (last Stanza), which was a sin.

(Stanzas 2, 3, & 4:) Those girls probably did care about me, and it was good for them to want things from a man, also.

> No one ever actually shamed me for having problems with a woman's body. I assumed that I would

be shamed based on how worldly women speak. Godly men and women are open to hearing about how their spouses want them to take care of their bodies.

And honestly, their bodies were favorable to me once they became unavailable. It makes me feel sick thinking about it now.

> Praise God for the Blood! Because
> that's all that I have for comfort
> when faced with how awful I was
> –Thank God that it's truly just who
> I was and not who I am.

To say that I ever loved these girls would be an insult to them, although they were certainly more than worth loving. To say that I ever loved them would be a lie because the only part of me that was attracted to them is now hanging on the Cross.

> I cringe thinking that, by opening
> their hearts to me, they thought
> that they were opening their hearts
> to God's way, and a man of God.

Poem #10: "Everything Else"

I've decided that I'm happy
Because I don't have anything that I want
But I have everything else

§

This was my attempt at godly contentment.

Yes, it is important to be grateful for what you have, but that is only half of it. Gratefulness was certainly very helpful, but could only carry me so far. Complete joy requires you to trust God for all that you want and more.

Poem #11: "Yes"

If it's a question of strength
You're the strong one
I'm powerless
You bless me
Or You build me
I'm just here to say yes

§

The first two lines are a quote from the book of Job. For what these words could mean, this poem is very sound, theologically.

However, I didn't really believe that God would bless me. What I really meant was "You will build me, so I don't have to hurt myself by hoping for a blessing."

Poem #12: "God & Girls"

Whether she shows up late
Or never
I accept your will willingly
I take my hand out
Not that I have a choice anymore

If it hurts
I'll press on
No sacrifice is too big for you

Thank you
For all you give
And all you take
I trust you know best

I may not be
Worth anything to them
They never think of me
But You are always thinking of me
And that is more than enough

I have no choice
But to bear the shame they placed on me
But at least I know
My consolation is greater than the prize I sought:
I'm still your sheep

When I have nothing
I am blessed
Because now You're my everything

Help me to accept her
When you finally give her to me
Not to drag her through the mud
For what other girls did

I thought that winning her would prove my worth
But you proved my worth
To You
By giving her to me

§

These poems are not in order. It may look to you like I was growing, but the truth is that I was praying this poem one day and then stewing in doubt the next.

As you can see, my spirit knew what was right all along. In fact, the last two Stanzas seem prophetic. I wrote them long before meeting Kelsey, and I did in fact have to overcome my sin of punishing her for what other girls did. She was in fact, handed to me by God; I did not have to win her over.

My spirit knew that proving my worth was wrong.

I wrote this as the prodigal son in the pig pen. But instead of running back to my Father for my needs, I tried to just accept starvation. And when that got too hard, I went right back to trying to gain for myself what only God could give me.

You know that this is what I was doing because of Stanzas 5 & 6. I was trying to be content with God alone, which He never

asks us to do. Yes, God should be more than enough to me and the most exciting part of my life—but that is because He loves me. He gives.

Poem #13: "Body & Blood (Justified)"

Jesus
I've done so much wrong
I've fought to take my beating
But You snatched my cross away

Your body won't share my cross
You snatched my punishment
And You won't give it back
Once guilty, but now I only accuse myself
Beaten so I can be whole

Your blood covers my door frame
My feet stand in Your place
I'm as blameless as Your Name
Undeserving, you call me worthy
And now I'll see Your face

You call me pure
Now I say it,
I'm pure
You call me holy
Now I say it,
I'm holy
I'll say it, I'll pray it, I'll lay it down

I'm Yours
And if You say I'm justified
Who am I to say any different?

Poem #14: "Upside Down"

If you say that up is down
If you say that the water's ground
That makes it true
I'll step and I won't fall through

Remembering times that they've been hurt
My friends cling to the boat
As the sea splits it at the seems
They cry out to me
To grab on for safety
They remind me that water has claimed the faithful
For all of history

If you say that up is down
If you say that the water is ground
That makes it true
I'll step and I won't fall through

And if step-by-step I sink
I know I will not drown
I'll walk upon the waves
He can turn the ocean upside down

So I'll keep on stepping
Where I'll sink if you don't catch me
So I'll keep on stepping
Where I have no power over certainty

The devil is a lot smarter than me
I trust in God no matter what I see
You pay me double for all they steal
I trust you no matter what I feel

The devil is a lot smarter than me
I trust in God no matter what I see
You pay me double for all I steal

I trust you no matter what I feel

When I thought I spent all You have
You run to me with the fattened calf

I will trust you in my money
And not in my own hand
Only you can heal me
It can't be fought or planned

I will trust you for my spouse
And not in my own hand
You can bring my children to life
All I can do is stand

I will trust in your forgiveness
And not it my own hand
You've given me power to obey you
I won't shift like sand

I know what I want is impossible
I have no choice but to trust you
It's my joy to say I do, because it's true
There's nothing that your love won't do

Different Loves

Loving Believers	Loving Nonbelievers	Loving All People
Give believers the benefit of the doubt. *Mathew 7:3-5* *James 1:19*	Leave sinners to sin. *1 Corinthians 5:12* *Matthew 7:6-7*	Don't judge. *Romans 2:1* *Luke 6:37*
Tell believers to be holy. *Galatians 6:1* *Hebrews 10:24*	Tell people about the Gospel. *Romans 10:14-15* *Ephesians 5:16*	Consider others as greater than yourself. *Matthew 22:39* *Romans 5:6-8*
Listen to other believers' warnings, encouragements, and teachings. *Romans 12:2-8* *Hebrews 3:12-13*	Do not conform to nonbelievers' way of thinking or be yoked to them. *Romans 12:2* *1 Corinthians 6:14-15*	Do not take revenge. Endure hate so that others can be freed from Satan. *Matthew 5:29* *Ephesians 6:12*
Go out of your way to do good to believers. Take care of their needs. *Romans 12:10* *John 13:34*	Do good to those who persecute you. *Luke 6:28* *Romans 12:14*	Give to those in need. *Luke 10:33-35* *Galatians 6:10*
Do not associate with flagrant sinners. *1 Corinthians 5:11* *Matthew 18:17*	Say "hey" to sinners. Eat with them if you want to. *Matthew 5:47* *1 Corinthians 10:27*	Call people to repentance. *Mark 6:18* *Acts 24:25*

There are way too many verses to include for each of these principles, so we have provided 2 each.

There are more examples of differences in a relationship between believers and nonbelievers, but we have limited those as well. This is only to give you an understanding that there are differences. You can discover more as you read on your own.

One thing to look for is when the Bible uses the word "brother" or the phrase "one another." This means that the writer is referring to a believer-believer relationship, although some aspects of the verse may also be true for our relationship with all people.

Some of these things may seem to contradict, but we believe that you can understand the meaning by seeking God yourself, and by asking your brothers and sisters.

Grace Explained

"Grace," like "good," "worthy," "love," and other words, are all difficult words to define because they are defined by who God is. Not one person starts life with the correct understanding of any of these words. Those of us who are being transformed will come to understand these words better as we come to know God more.

Although there are traditional definitions of the Greek "Grace" among Christians, the Greeks themselves used the word "grace" to describe things in the same way that English-speaking nonbelievers use the word:[421]

Beauty, of a man's smooth speech or of a woman who's been divinely blessed in her appearance.

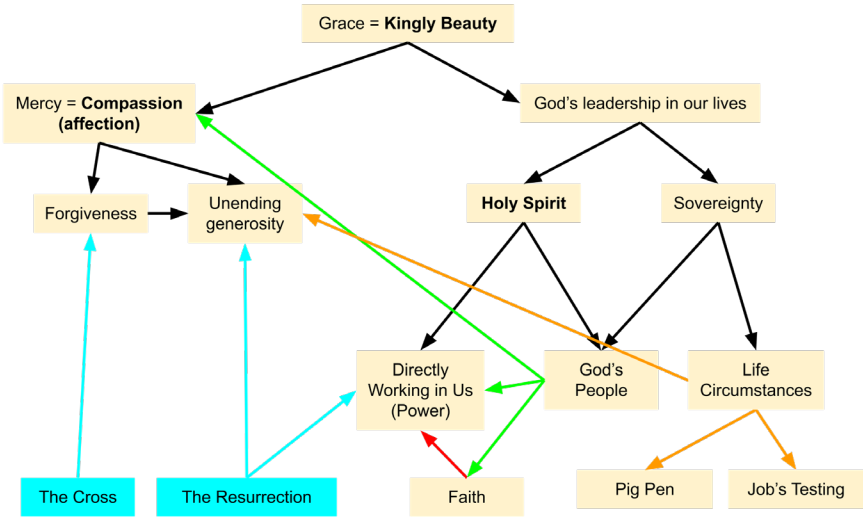
421 The Iliad and the Odyssey, 8th Century BC

Divine favor, generous gifts, and hospitality

Outside of church, as a child, I was taught that things like lions, deer, ballerinas, and kings were graceful. These things are powerful, but have beautiful gentleness and control.

The Old Testament's Hebrew word for "grace" is incredibly similar to these definitions,[422] but is especially associated with God and men of authority.[423]

If you read your Bible or go to church, then you also know that "grace" is often tagged along with "mercy" and sometimes seems to be used interchangeably, in the Old and New Testaments. What is the difference between the two? This can become even more confusing when you see that "grace" also seems to be defined as "the power to be like Jesus" in the New Testament.



Now, this is not a perfect explanation of grace. Even looking at this chart now, there are things that I would like to add but

422 Including using "grace" to mean "a woman's charm"; Proverbs 31:30

423 Genesis 6:8; Esther 2:17

won't for the sake of simplicity. Maybe other Christians would take a different approach to defining the word, and that can also be correct.

Test this chart against all Scripture, and it should work. You may need help from a mature pastor to understand this chart.

Hopefully what I have already said in this chapter and in other chapters of this book will help you to understand most of this, but I will explain "Sovereignty" as part of grace because it is the only thing that I have not covered extensively:

God' people are a part of His grace through Sovereignty and not just His Spirit. This is because prophecy is not the only method by which other believers can do God's work in our lives directly. Just because someone does not have a direct word from God to you does not mean that their words are not God's words to you. After all, He put them in your life for that purpose.

God's grace is also our life circumstances. Every bad thing that happens to us, He lets it happen.

Sometimes this is judgment, not of ourselves but of our actions.[424] He hurts as a consequence for our actions so that we will stop. After we stop, there is no punishment—even if the affliction continues. Sometimes bad things are just testing from Satan: God is giving us the opportunity to trust Him so that we can have the pleasure of serving Him.

When good things happen (if they are not a plunder of your current sin)[425] then that is God's generosity. By Christ's work, we have been given the right to an infinite amount of God's generosity (anything that we ask Him for), but even nonbelievers experience this in a way, since no one suffers every afflic-

424 1 Corinthians 11:29

425 James 5:1-5; Not just wealth, but any pleasurable things—status, sex, etc.—which becomes shameful loss to you in itself. (They become something that you wish that you never obtained, even though you saw them as a gain before—it cannot be both a loss and a gain.) Thank God that these things can be forgotten too!

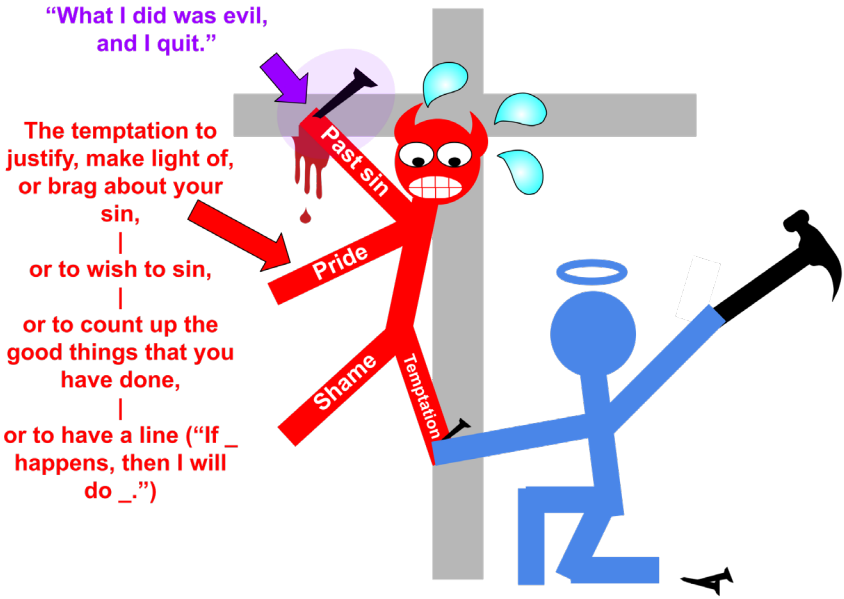
tion, as we all deserve.

You could also say that God's leadership in our lives to transform us is a result of His unending generosity, since "All things work together for the good of those who love God."[426]

I should add that believers in our lives give "faith" by praying and believing for our transformation.

However, the reason that the only red arrow comes from "Faith" is because it is the only thing that we do ourselves to receive grace (by belief and action). "It is by grace through faith" that we have been saved[427] (first transformed), but that is also the only way that we are continually transformed.[428]

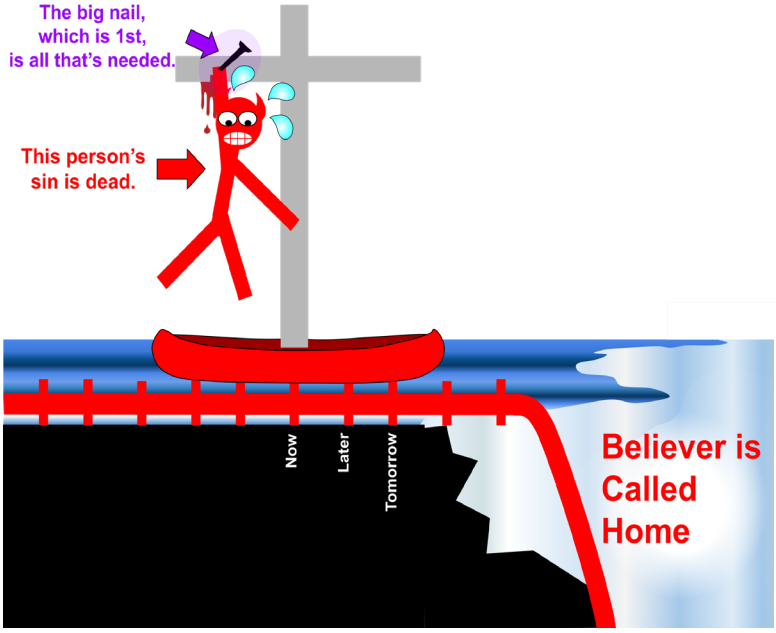
Once-For-All Repentance


"What I did was evil, and I quit."
The temptation to justify, make light of, or brag about your sin,
|
or to wish to sin,
|
or to count up the good things that you have done,
|
or to have a line ("If _ happens, then I will do _.")
Past sin
Pride
Shame
Temptation

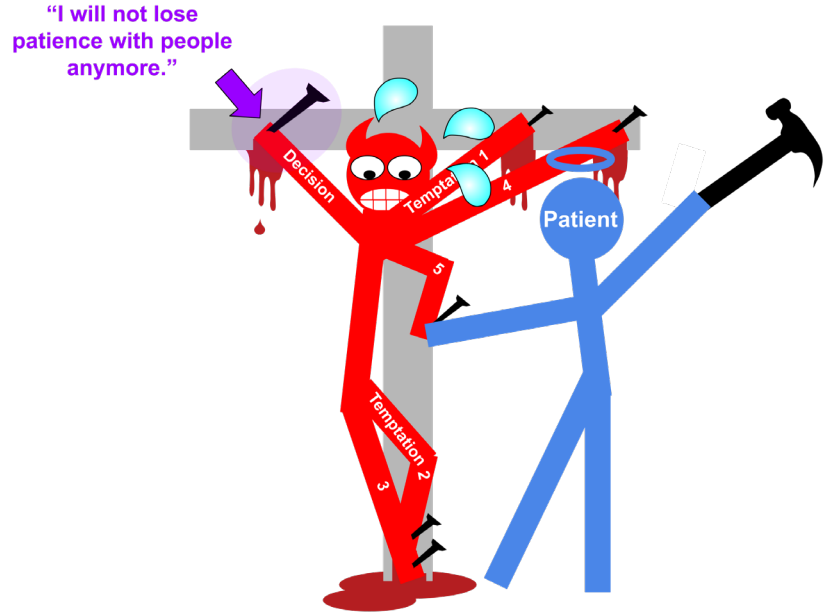
426 Romans 8:28

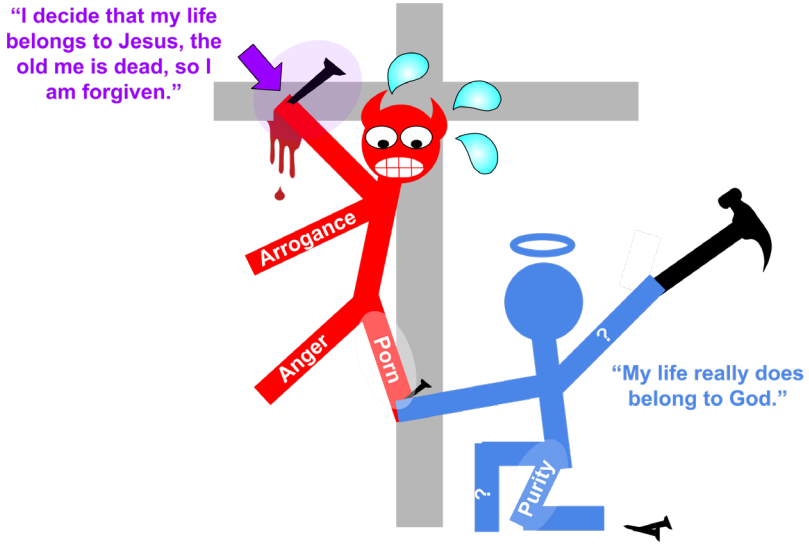
427 Ephesians 2:8-9

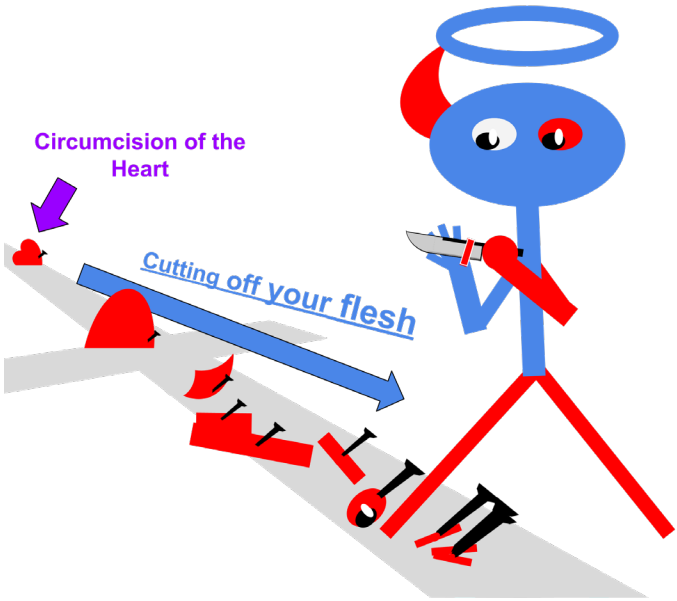
428 Titus 2:11-12


The big nail, which is 1st, is all that's needed.
This person's sin is dead.
Now
Later
Tomorrow
Believer is Called Home

Any limb can knock the big nail free.


"I will not lose patience with people anymore."
Decision
Temptation 1
4
5
Temptation 2
3
Patient


"I decide that my life belongs to Jesus, the old me is dead, so I am forgiven."
Arrogance
Anger
Porn
?
?
Purity
"My life really does belong to God."


Circumcision of the Heart
Cutting off your flesh

Related Resources

We don't necessarily agree 100% with the content in all of these resources, but God spoke to them what He spoke to us, and in some cases spoke through them to us:

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Life Together. Translated by John W. Doberstein. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009.

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Key Passages

Matthew 5-7

Matthew 18

Romans 7-8